GUITARS, CARS, WATCHES, WINE & THE DELUXE LIFE

GUITAR AFICIONADO

MAGAZINE

SPECIAL COUNTRY ISSUE

VINCE GILL

From Collector to Curator

BRENT MASON

Confessions *of a* Nashville Studio Ace

TAL FARLOW

A Jazz Legend's Private Collection

PLUS

SONGBIRDS

The Ultimate Guitar Museum

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SPIRITS
CUBAN RUM—LEGAL AT LAST

GUITARS
GREG BRANDT'S CLASSICAL MASTERPIECE

Muddy Waters' *Guild* THUNDERBIRD

PAGE 80

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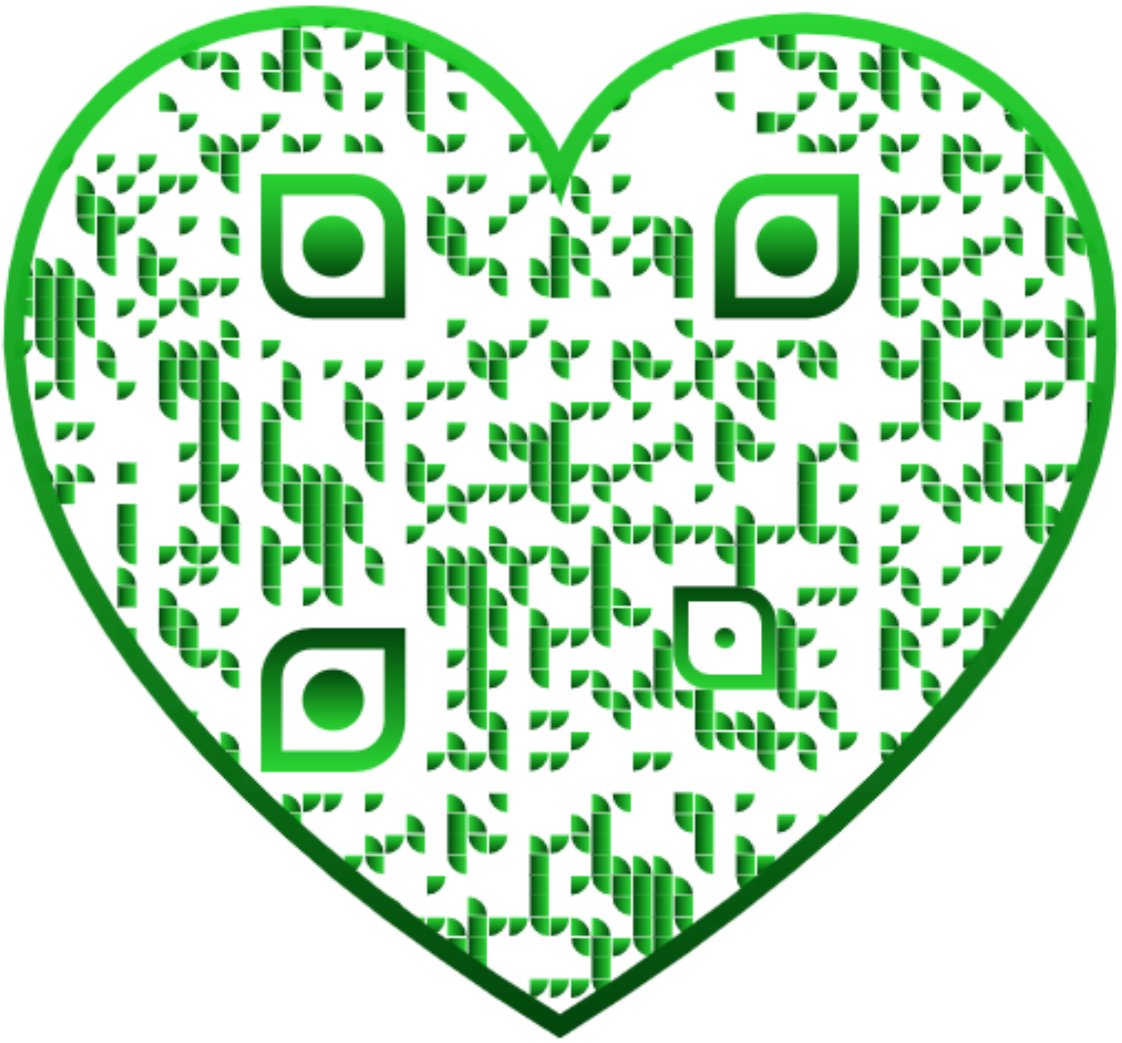

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MAY/JUNE • 17 *features* VOL. 9 / NO. 3

28
VINCE GILL
The country legend's tools of the trade are as classic and timeless as his music.
BY ALAN DI PERNA

38
THE SONGBIRDS GUITAR MUSEUM
At its home in Chattanooga, the new museum exhibits the best instruments from private collectors, sharing them in the public spotlight.
by ALAN DI PERNA

46
BRENT MASON
He's the top-flight picker on hundreds of hit country records and soundtracks to Hollywood blockbusters, TV shows, and commercials. But Brent Mason might be the most-heard guitarist you've never heard of.
by JOE BOSSO

56
TAL FARLOW
A collection of seven guitars owned by the late great jazz giant reveals that he was equally visionary as a player and guitar design innovator.
by MAC RANDALL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF FASANO, GROOMING BY DEBRA WINGO FOR SALON WINGO

Vince Gill with his 1942 Martin D-28 herringbone

COVER PHOTO BY **JEFF FASANO**

MARK NASON
LOS ANGELES
·FRABJOUS FOOTWEAR·

GUITAR AFICIONADO

MAY/JUNE • 17 *departments* VOL. 9 / NO. 3

13
EFFECTS
13 New & Cool Guitar
16 Spirits
18 Watches
20 Best of the Best
22 Footwear
24 Auctions
26 *GA* Recommends

64
COLUMNS
64 **The Fix:** Guitar Care
66 **The Oeno File:** The Wine Market
68 **The Circuit:** Vintage Amps

70
REVIEWS
70 **The Best on Test:** Greg Brandt Standard Concert Model
72 **The Ride:** 2017 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio
74 **Top Gear:** Friedman Amplification Mini Dirty Shirley

80
PHOTO FINISH
Photographer Lee Tanner catches the great Muddy Waters in the act.

22 pg

MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

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Letter *from the* Editor

MY GRANDFATHER on my mother's side was a fan of country music, as was my father, so I listened to a lot of country music while growing up. I can remember a few Merle Travis and Chet Atkins albums in my dad's somewhat sparse vinyl collection, and one night when we were watching television together I remember being so in awe of Roy Clark's fleet-fingered banjo playing that I decided I wanted to be able to do that too. However, banjo was considered too advanced for young fingers like mine, and a teacher recommended that I start with guitar and work my way up. After a few years of playing guitar, I eventually started playing banjo and got pretty good at it, but that was also around the time that I discovered that girls really liked guys who played guitar. The banjo? Not so much.

Soon my musical tastes shifted to heavy metal, punk, and funk, and I ignored country for the next few years. Country music kept calling out to me, however. As I started to develop a taste for rockabilly, I began to discover players like Hank Garland, Grady Martin, and other Nashville session players who were also known for their work with country artists. Then one day I heard Albert Lee, and my mind was officially blown. Here was a genuine country guitarist who could shred faster than the fastest shred-metal rocker and who also reminded me of Roy Clark's flash and fury that got me started on my guitar playing journey in the first place.

From that point onward I sought out every hot country guitarist both current and classic to further familiarize and educate myself with their work. During the late Eighties, when I found out that Albert Lee would be performing at North Hollywood's Palomino Club with the Biff Baby All-Stars, I made sure to get there early to nab a seat front and center. To my surprise, a second hot-shot guitarist shared the stage with Lee that night, a gentleman named Vince who also shared my last name. To this day, that show remains one of my favorite guitar memories, as Lee and Gill pushed each other's playing to the limit in playful yet dazzling duels of skill, speed, and taste.

When putting together *Guitar Aficionado's* first-ever country special issue, I knew Vince Gill would be the perfect choice for his incredible success, still-dazzling playing, and his impressive guitar collection. Brent Mason was chosen because to me he is the present-day equivalent of Hank Garland and Grady Martin, and I'm sure that he'll be inspiring players 20 years from now, just like Garland and Martin influenced me. Country music is constantly changing, but great guitar players like Gill and Mason have never gone out of style.

CHRIS GILL
Editor-in-Chief

GUITAR AFICIONADO

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NEWBAY MEDIA, LLC
28 East 28th Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10016
www.nbmedia.com

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GUITAR AFICIONADO (ISSN 1949-0690) is published bimonthly by NewBay Media, LLC, 28 East 28th Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10016. Phone: 212.378.0400. Fax: 917.281.4704. Web Site: www.nbmedia.com. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Subscriptions: Basic rate (6 issues): US: $29.95US; Canada: $39.95US; Foreign: $44.95US. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220688. PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand-only specials. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to *Guitar Aficionado*, P.O. Box 469030, Escondido, CA 92046-9030. Returns: Pitney Bowes, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada.

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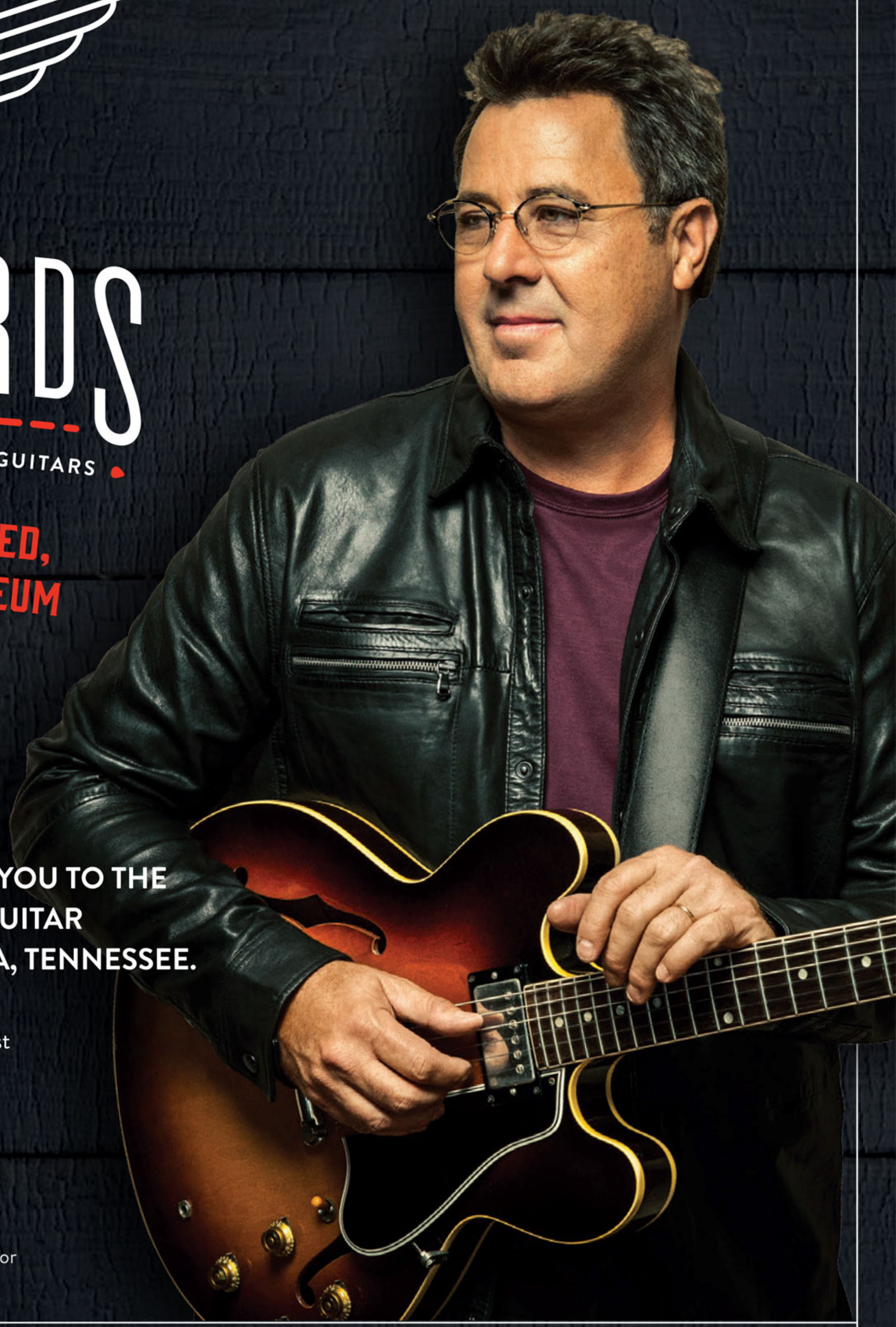

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SPIRITS P.16
WATCHES P.18
BEST OF THE BEST P.20
FOOTWEAR P.22
AUCTIONS P.24
GA RECOMMENDS P.26

Effects

NEW + COOL GUITAR

ROYAL FAMILY

FODERA IMPERIAL CUSTOM

{ BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK }

VINNY FODERA AND JOEY LAURICELLA started Fodera Guitars in Brooklyn in 1983. But for more than three decades since they began building instruments, their small shop has grown to become, despite the instrument referenced in the company's name, one of the most renowned brands in custom bass design.

The irony isn't lost on Fodera. "For some reason I'll never really know, in the early days we attracted more bass players than guitar players to our shop asking for custom instruments," he says today. "And it exponentially grew from there." But, he adds, "from day one, we've also been building guitars—I play guitar, and our very first instrument, serial number 001, was a guitar. So they've always been a big part of what we do."

Guitars are taking a more central role in the Fodera story with the company's introduction of two new models: the snappy, single-coil-loaded Emperor and the luxurious single-cutaway, dual humbucker-equipped Imperial. The latter guitar is offered in two versions: Deluxe, with a choice of tonewoods and other features, and a top-of-the-line Custom that "allows customers a great range of customization," says Jason DeSalvo, Fodera's third partner. "They can choose any top wood we offer, or any different humbucker that can fit into our pickup rout.

They can put block inlays in the fingerboard instead of dots, pick different hardware and finishes—a lot of tone-shaping and aesthetic options are available to create an entirely unique instrument."

The Imperial Custom shown here was built to specifications chosen by Eric Martin of Memphis' Martin Music, "a dear friend of ours that Vin has been working with for over 20 years," DeSalvo says. With this particular instrument, Fodera explains, "We were shooting for a very familiar tonal blend, that being a mahogany body and neck, with a maple cap and rosewood fretboard. It's one of those time-proven magic mixtures of wood that works for a lot of people."

Given Fodera's reputation for building instruments that boast tonally and visually stunning—as well as often exotic—woods, the company put its own twist on the "familiar blend" used here. Thus, the one-piece mahogany body is capped with a striking 1/4-inch-thick piece of Japanese maple, "a very, very beautiful wood," Fodera says. "It's a hard maple, so tonally it gave us the sonic character we were looking for. Japanese maple trees tend to be small, so it's challenging to find chunks big enough to make a guitar top. But we have dealers all over the place that know if they ever come across something like that to give us a call."

The mahogany neck is constructed using the three-piece quartersawn design approach that Fodera has long employed on its basses, offering increased stability and "virtually eliminating the chance of the neck ever twisting," Fodera says. The neck is set into the body by way of Fodera's "heel-less" dovetail joint. "So your thumb can go with great ease uninterrupted all the way up the neck, and you can actually play chords up in the highest position much easier than you can on most other similar types of guitars." The rosewood fingerboard is a solid slab of CITES-certified Brazilian, sourced from beams used in the construction of a house. "So this particular batch was reclaimed dimensional lumber, which is kind of wild," DeSalvo notes.

"WE REALLY PUT A LOT OF HEART AND SOUL INTO THESE THINGS." — **VINNY FODERA**

The reverence for classic six-string design with a twist is also reflected in the Imperial's pickups. As befits an instrument with a single-cut body and maple cap, the Imperial boasts a dual-humbucker configuration, only the pickups are proprietary models designed in conjunction with Seymour Duncan. "Seymour and his team have been very good about working with us to give us something that's a little bit different and that suits our purposes," Fodera says. The two humbuckers in this Imperial, he continues, "are similar to Seymour Duncan's SH-11 neck and SH-14 bridge pickups. But then we fiddle with different magnet types, different windings, and trying to shape certain frequencies. Depending on what body wood the pickups are going into, we'll make subtle changes that are custom matched to the tone of the particular guitar."

They're also smartly matched to its aesthetics. The two humbuckers are set in rosewood pickup rings that complement the fingerboard, and finished with gold pickup covers that pair nicely with the gold volume and tone knobs and Sperzel locking tuners. Another nice touch is the proprietary Brazilian rosewood tailpiece, which is fitted with a solid brass insert for extra heft. "The tailpiece bolts directly to the top of the body, so there's great transmission of energy and vibration from the string directly into the instrument," Fodera says. "And the design also gives the guitar a unique appearance."

Other features contributing to the Imperial's unique appearance are cupcake knobs ("a bit of an unusual shape, but it just seemed to fit," Fodera says), a custom abalone butterfly logo headstock inlay, mother-of-pearl block fretboard markers, and black Anigre pinstriping around the body. Of this last attribute, Fodera explains, "The pinstripe separates the top from the body in an elegant way. It just always looked rather cheap to me to not have a laminate between the cap and the body, so we started doing it back in 1983 when no one else was doing it. Now it's maybe a little more common. But the idea is to create contrast and to offer something that's pleasing to the eye."

This Imperial Custom, which is currently being offered for sale, is one of only 10 or so guitars Fodera built last year. "I don't think we'll build more than 25 or 30 this year," DeSalvo notes. "And that's against maybe 400 basses. But we're in the guitar space for the long haul." As for whether Fodera will ever be as synonymous with guitars as the company is with basses? "I would like to hope so," he says. "But what's more important for us is that we're recognized as a company that, whether it's a guitar or a bass, is serious about making the best handbuilt instrument that can possibly be made."

"We really put a lot of heart and soul into these things," Fodera adds. "We take a lot of pride in what we do, and we don't crank out stuff for profit, or try to do something just to make a splashy new look. We like to create instruments that really help the musician, because we're cut from the same cloth, really. Whenever a guitar or bass player comes to the shop, they get very excited to see us do what we do. And I tell them I get the same excitement when I go to see them play. We're part of the same circle. So it's a beautiful feedback loop."

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Fodera, fodera.com

HAVANA HEAT

THE ONCE-FORBIDDEN PLEASURES OF GENUINE CUBAN RUM ARE NOW ACCESSIBLE TO AMERICAN CONNOISSEURS.

{ BY CHRIS GILL }

IF YOU'VE EVER had a Cuba Libre or Mojito anywhere outside of the United States, it's highly likely that the versions of those cocktails you've had in the U.S. didn't taste the same or as good as the ones you've enjoyed abroad. The secret is that authentic recipes of these drinks call for genuine Cuban rum, which has been prohibited in the U.S. since 1962.

Fortunately, rum runners with discriminating taste no longer have to worry about getting busted for having bottles of Cuban rum in their luggage when returning home from trips abroad. While travelers to Cuba have recently seen a significant easing of restrictions on Cuban goods—particularly cigars and rum—that they can legally bring home, as of October 17, 2016, restrictions on Cuban rum and cigars purchased in other countries were also lifted. This means that when you visit Canada, Mexico, Europe, Asia, or elsewhere, you can now legally bring home Cuban rum and cigars purchased on your trip.

Rum distilled by Cuba's biggest producer, Havana Club, is the easiest to find abroad, but the brands Legendario, Ron Cubay, and Ron Mulata are also worth seeking out. Even so, Havana Club's 7-Year-Old Añejo and Selección de Maestros are among the best rums Cuba has to offer. These dark rums have a rich, smoky personality with seductive flavors of cedar, espresso, nutmeg, and brown sugar that perfectly complement the robust assertiveness of a fine Cuban cigar. The 7-Year-Old Añejo is an excellent sipper, but it also makes one hell of a great Cuba Libre when mixed with cane sugar Coca Cola and fresh lime. Made from a hand-picked blend of barrels selected by Havana Club's master distillers, the Selección de Maestros is one of Havana's finest sipping rums, delivering a complex, heady blend of spice, citrus, tobacco, and cocoa flavors along with the aforementioned flavor profile.

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{ ANNOTATIONS BY SCOTT HICKEY }

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ARNOLD & SON

DSTB
(1ATAS.U01A.C121S)

In most mechanical watches, the seconds hand appears to glide around the dial. A rare but notable exception is the "true beat," where the seconds hand pauses—waits a beat—before continuing its staccato rhythm. In this new steel version of the DSTB (Dial Side True Beat), the wheels and anchor-shaped lever responsible for the true-beat effect are in constant motion behind the transparent seconds counter.

$29,995,
arnoldandson.com

GREUBEL FORSEY

SIGNATURE 1
(P369)

The dial has drifted northeast to expose the frenzied oscillations of the watch's oversized balance wheel, as well as the movement's superior finishing. From the Geneva stripes, sharp internal angles, and crisp bevels, every metal surface you can see (and even some you can't) has been decorated by a team of skilled artisans. Production of the rose gold Signature 1 is limited to just 11 pieces.

$185,000,
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ROMAIN GAUTHIER

LOGICAL ONE
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(MON00146)

A mechanical watch's accuracy typically decreases as the energy in the mainspring wanes. To compensate, one of the earliest solutions watchmakers developed was the chain-and-fusee, a device that keeps tension on the mainspring to maintain a steady flow of energy. Romain Gauthier's award-winning Logical One builds on that concept with a new chain that replaces the old metal links with ones made of synthetic rubies.

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FILLING STATION

GUSTATORY JOURNEYS AWAIT YOU AT PHILADELPHIA'S READING TERMINAL MARKET.

{ BY MICHAEL COLAMECO }

THOUGH I'VE LIVED in Manhattan since 1982, my family hails from Overbrook, West Philly, where we lived off and on for most of the Sixties and Seventies. Back then it was a mostly an Italian/Irish neighborhood, with great ethnic food stores, independent bakeries, butchers, and pastry shops. I decamped town to attend the Culinary Institute of America in 1979, and after graduation I spent the following decade working my way up the ladder in NYC restaurants.

Fast-forward to the mid Nineties, when I was married and had two young sons, and we spent most of the year down at a Jersey Shore beach house that we built when we ran our seasonal restaurant, The Globe. My boys attended West Cape May Elementary school just down the street. One of my favorite memories from that era was our bimonthly off-season Saturday family trips to Reading Terminal Market in Center City, Philadelphia.

As a chef, I've always been really picky about where I eat and where I shop for ingredients. It is often said that 90 percent of good cooking is good shopping. While Cape May has great farm markets in the summer and great fish markets, by late October your only options outside of fresh local seafood are supermarket produce, Wonder Bread, and commodity meats. So every other Saturday we'd load the kids into the back of car, drive 90 minutes northwest just across the Walt Whitman Bridge to Center City, park, and get ready to eat and shop.

When we'd arrive around noon, the market was always bustling. The Terminal building itself was, and remains, part of the allure. Built in the late 1800s, Reading Terminal was originally a rail terminal and food hall under one roof, with a completely open floor plan and soaring ceilings above a space divided into food stalls of various shapes and sizes. By 1913, it billed itself as "the source of main food supply of Philadelphia and adjacent territory." You could shop there and have your groceries boxed, labeled, and loaded onto your train home to the suburbs. In 1971, the rail line declared bankruptcy, and in 1984 the last train left the terminal. Fortunately, through a preservation fund, the space was saved and has grown and thrived ever since.

Today, the market is busy as ever. On weekends, Amish producers come from Lancaster County with stalls like Godshall's Poultry, offering the best-tasting chickens and freshest eggs, and Martin's Quality Meats, selling great beef, pork, and pork sausages. There are vendors with homemade pickled vegetables, jars of apple butter, fresh-baked pies, freshly fried doughnuts, and hand-rolled soft pretzels baked in small batches all day long and brushed with butter fresh from the oven. Great eating options include Pearl's Oyster Bar for fried seafood (especially their fried oysters), hand-scooped Bassett's Ice Cream (a fifth-generation business going back to 1861 and claiming to be America's oldest ice cream company), and DiNic's, where you can get roast pork sandwiches topped with pan juices, broccoli rabe, and extra-sharp aged provolone.

Other favorites include Metropolitan Bakery for artisan breads, and an outpost of Termini Brothers, the legendary South Philly Italian bakery. There are dozens of stands selling produce, seafood stalls, spice vendors, and more, and the market is outfitted with an abundance of communal bench-style seating where you can comfortably enjoy your meals. There's even an upright piano out back where local talent can entertain the seated diners.

Manhattan may have Chelsea Market, Eataly, the ever-expanding Grand Central Market, Hudson Eats, and many other markets, but I'll take Reading Terminal over them all any day of the week, particularly if it's a Saturday when the Amish come to town.

Visit readingterminalmarket.org for directions, hours, and more information.

New York City–based chef and media personality Michael Colameco is the author of *Mike Colameco's Food Lover's Guide to NYC* and hosts *Colameco's Food Show* on PBS and the nationally syndicated radio program *Weekend Food*.

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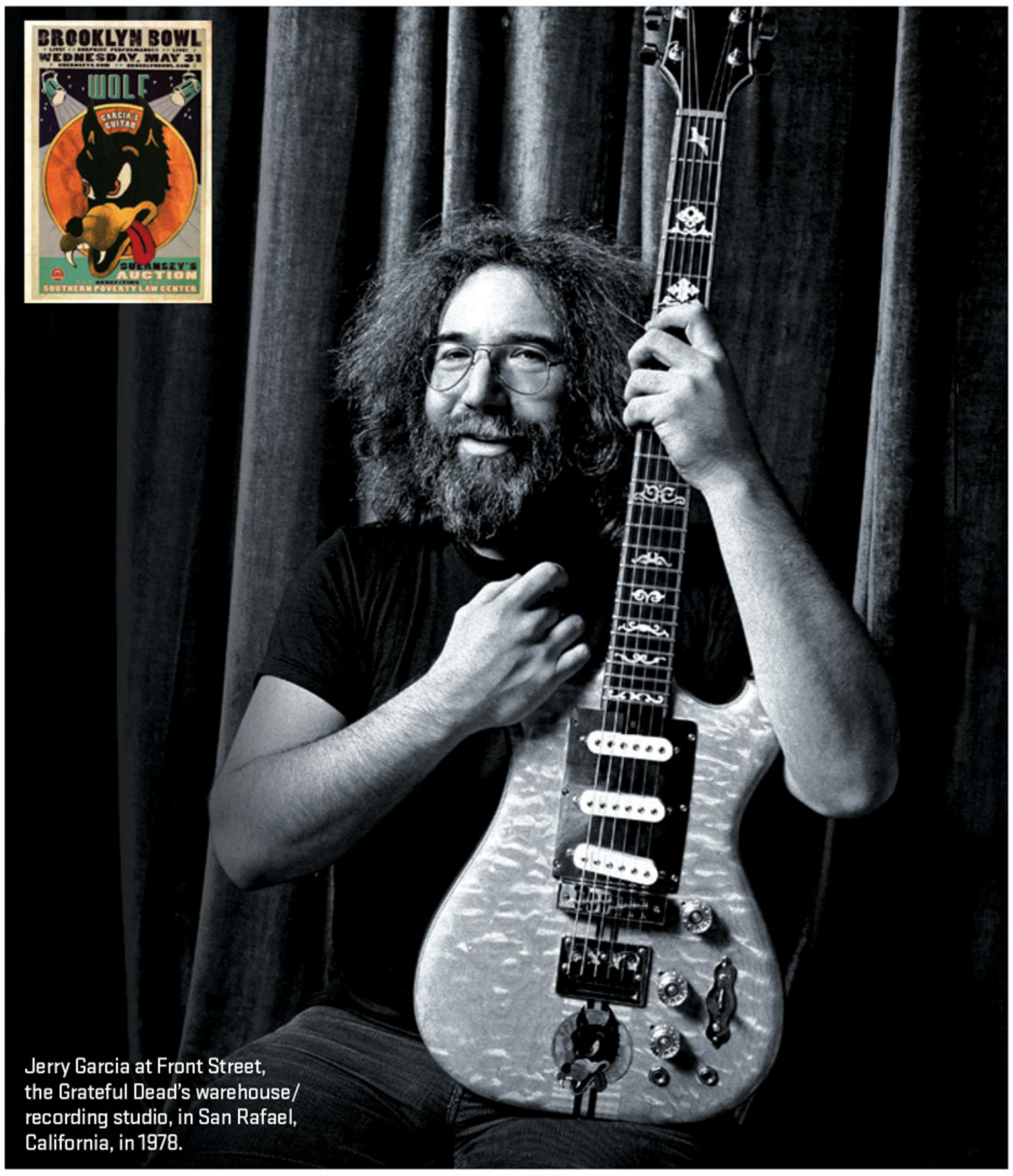

Jerry Garcia at Front Street, the Grateful Dead's warehouse/ recording studio, in San Rafael, California, in 1978.

WOLF TRUMPS HATE

GUERNSEY'S UPCOMING AUCTION OF JERRY GARCIA'S LEGENDARY WOLF GUITAR WILL BENEFIT THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER.

{ BY ALAN DI PERNA }

THE STORY OF Jerry Garcia's custom guitar known as Wolf is legendary. Originally created for the Grateful Dead icon by luthier Doug Irwin in 1973, Wolf will once again make history on May 31 when Guernsey's Auctions puts it on the block at a single-item sale to be held at the Brooklyn Bowl in New York City. All proceeds from the sale will be donated to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance, and discrimination through education and litigation.

"The purpose of this event is to raise people's awareness of the need for groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center at a time that seems very divisive in our country," Guernsey's president Arlan Ettinger says.

Garcia first performed publicly with Wolf on September 5, 1973, at a private Hell's Angels party in New York. He went on to play it prominently throughout the Seventies. It was the first guitar custom-made for Garcia, who would commission Irwin to build other guitars for him bearing the names Tiger, Wolf Jr., and Rosebud. Following Garcia's death in 1995, his will left Wolf and Tiger to Irwin, who had fallen on hard times. The two guitars rescued him from homelessness when they were sold at a Guernsey's auction in 2002. Tiger sold for a record-breaking $957,500 to noted collector Jim Irsay. Wolf was purchased for $789,500 by philanthropist, musician, and filmmaker Dan Pritzker.

Earlier this year, Ettinger received a call from Pritzker. "Dan said that he was deeply concerned about the direction our new government was taking, and he wanted to do something that was beneficial to everyone. With that, he asked that we conduct an auction of Wolf and give 100 percent of the hammer price to the Southern Poverty Law Center."

"The time is right for Wolf to do some good," Pritzker says. "My wife and I have long supported the efforts of the Southern Poverty Law Center. If we ever needed the SPLC, we sure do need them now."

Wolf boasts a neck-through-body design, with a body core of amaranth (purpleheart) laminated with bookmatched curly Western maple. The 24-fret fingerboard is of Gabon ebony with African ivory and mother-of-pearl inlays, and bound with maple, purpleheart and ebony laminations, Pickups are attached to the instrument via a solid brass, chrome-nickel-plated mounting plate, which Irwin designed so Garcia could change his pickup configuration.

The May 31 Wolf auction at Brooklyn Bowl will be a ticketed event with performances by a number of celebrity musical acts. (The lineup was still TBD at press time). All proceeds from ticket sales, corporate sponsorships, and other sources of income related to the sale will also be donated to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Pritzker has guaranteed that $1.5 million will go to the SPLC, should the final sale price for Wolf fall short of that amount. But this seems highly unlikely. Shortly after the news broke that Wolf was coming onto the auction market once again, Guernsey's received an offer of $1.5 million for the instrument.

"I think that Wolf will set a world auction record even without proceeds from the event and corporate sponsorship," Ettinger says. "People recognize the need to step up and do something important to combat racism, neo-Nazi hate groups, skinheads, and the like."

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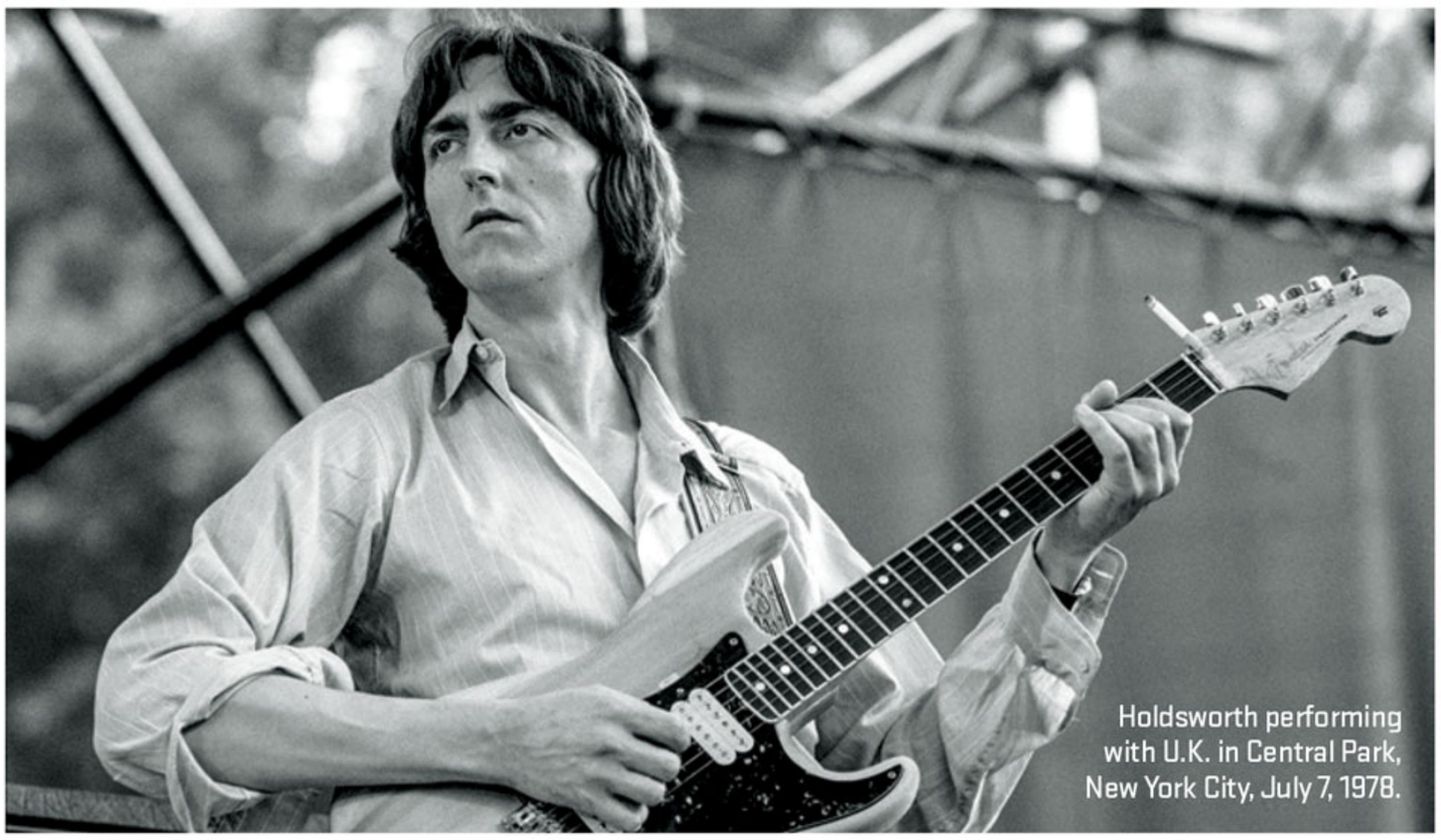
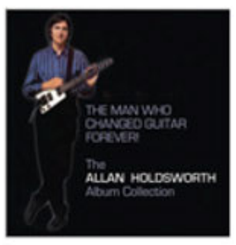


Holdsworth performing with U.K. in Central Park, New York City, July 7, 1978.

LORD OF THE STRINGS

ALLAN HOLDSWORTH'S FRETBOARD WIZARDRY IS CELEBRATED IN A NEW CD COLLECTION SPANNING HIS SOLO WORK FROM 1982 TO 2003.



The Man Who Changed Guitar Forever!
The Allan Holdsworth Album Collection
Manifesto Records ($98.59, 12 CDs)

WHAT DOES IT TAKE to become a guitar hero to guitar heroes? Take a listen to Allan Holdsworth and you'll get an idea. The jazz-fusion innovator has been hailed by such six-string legends as Carlos Santana, John McLaughlin, Frank Zappa, Steve Vai, and Joe Satriani. No less a player than Eddie Van Halen told *Guitar World* in 1980, "To me, Allan Holdsworth is number one."

The reason is evident in the listening. Holdsworth's chord vocabulary and exquisitely sophisticated chord progressions are dazzling enough, to say nothing of his solo guitar work, in which he applies any variety of scale forms to create complex and unpredictable lines embued with saxophone-like fluidity. (Not surprisingly, he started out wanting to be a saxophonist; he just couldn't afford the instrument.)

But his daunting talent is also evident in the viewing. Holdsworth's fret-hand reach is legendary and intimidating to view. It's not surprising that few guitarists have attempted to replicate his music. The physical challenges and technical hurdles alone are enough to rule out most players.

Since taking up guitar in the early Sixties at the relatively late age of 17, Holdsworth has plied his own singular approach to the instrument, first as a sideman and later on his own. Following an album with the legendary avant-jazz group Soft Machine in 1975, he migrated first to drummer Tony Williams' Lifetime project, then to French-English prog rockers Gong, before landing in the supergroup U.K. in 1978. It was there, working alongside drummer Bill Bruford, bassist John Wetton, and keyboardist Eddie Jobson, that Holdsworth first came to the attention of many guitarists.

In 1982, he launched his prodigious solo career, one that has seen him release some 15 authorized live and studio albums of mostly original compositions. The resulting catalog has found Holdsworth straddling the genres of jazz, rock, and prog, while being something of a technological pioneer for his embrace in the Eighties of the SynthAxe, a guitar-like MIDI controller he enthusiastically put to use in his music for some 15 years.

At long last, his solo catalog is being revisited with *The Man Who Changed Guitar Forever!*, a box set comprising all 12 of Holdsworth's solo albums from 1982 to 2003. Every track has been digitally remastered and embellished with bonus material plus a 40-page booklet with liner notes and archival photos. It's been said that to study Holdsworth's music is to undertake a lifetime apprenticeship. For students of his virtuosity, this box set is a must. —*Christopher Scapelliti*

BOOKS

BURNING DESIRE: THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE LENS OF ED CARAEFF

By Ed Caraeff

ACC Publishing Group Ltd ($49.95, 192 pages)

On June 18, 1967, Ed Caraeff was a 17-year-old photographer who found himself standing at the foot of the Monterey Pop festival stage when Jimi Hendrix set his Fender Stratocaster on fire. Caraeff's photo of that moment became one of the defining images of rock and launched his career as a music photographer and album cover designer. In this new book, he collects rare and unseen photos of Hendrix, including 100 black-and-white and color images from Monterey Pop, Whisky A-Go-Go, and the 1969 Newport Pop Festival,. The photos are accompanied by reprinted articles from the era that provide context, along with Caraeff's own remembrances of the incendiary guitarist.

VINYL . ALBUM . COVER . ART: THE COMPLETE HIPGNOSIS CATALOGUE

By Aubrey Powell

Thames & Hudson ($40, 320 pages)

From the Seventies through the early Eighties, no one defined album art like Hipgnosis. Founded in 1967 by Storm Thorgerson, Aubrey Powell, and Peter Christopherson, the English design collective transformed the medium with its enigmatic covers for groups like Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, the Police, Genesis, 10cc, and hundreds of other bands across rock's varied spectrum. Arranged chronologically, *Hipgnosis: The Complete Album Covers* features reproductions of every single cover—more than 300 in total—and offers insights from musicians like Robert Plant, Peter Gabriel, and Nick Mason, as well as the illuminating stories behind each cover's creation.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

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The first Firebird to be introduced into the Collector's Choice range from Gibson Custom is a rarity on several fronts, including its very clean finish and its unusually minimal wear. It's also one of the very, very few Cherry finishes that Gibson applied to a Firebird in the 1960's. The Firebird III, so called due to its chrome hardware, vibrato tailpiece, and two mini-humbucker pickups, features neck through construction, hand-sprayed nitro-cellulose lacquer and meticulous attention to detail necessary to replicate the original (serial #235304). Collector's Choice #47, like all the guitars in the range, is the result of hands-on examinations, laser-guided profile scans and final approval of its accuracy by the current owner.

GUITAR SLINGER

THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE FOR COUNTRY LEGEND

VINCE GILL

ARE AS CLASSIC AND TIMELESS AS HIS MUSIC.

BY ALAN DI PERNA

PHOTOS BY JEFF FASANO

GROOMING BY DEBRA WINGO FOR SALON WINGO

p29
GA

VINCE GILL'S MUSICAL OUTPUT HAS been both prolific and diverse. He can break your heart with a mournful country ballad like 2013's "Sad One Comin' On," or knock you out cold with bursts of breakneck guitar picking like the 2011 *tour de force* "Guitar Slinger." While firmly anchored in country's rich legacy of song, Gill has been especially adept at finding the common thread that links many styles of American roots music.

"My career has been all over the map," he acknowledges. "It's been real traditional country; it's been real pop. It still rocks pretty good; it's bluesy—all these things. I never wanted to do just one thing over and over."

Since emerging in the mid Eighties as a country crossover hit maker, he has released a string of impeccable solo albums that showcase his sterling songcraft, his high, lonesome, Orbison-esque tenor voice, and his formidable six-string prowess. But Gill has also found time for side projects like 2013's *Bakersfield*, a collection of rousing, honky-tonk renditions of 10 classics by Buck Owens and Merle Haggard that Gill recorded with steel-guitar ace Paul Franklin.

"I feel a real commitment to traditional country music because I think it's waning from popularity and people don't hear it so much anymore," Gill says. "So I want to stick up for it. There will always be an element in me that wants to be reverent toward great traditional music. People don't realize how soulful country music can be. It can be just as soulful as Ray Charles."

In that same spirit, another of Gill's side projects is the Time Jumpers, an all-star coterie of Nashville players devoted to western swing and kindred styles, which Gill joined in 2010. In fact, he recently bagged the 21st Grammy of his career for writing the title track to the Time Jumpers' third album, 2016's *Kid Sister*. Voted Best American Roots Song, "Kid Sister" pays homage to Time Jumpers singer and longtime Gill backing vocalist Dawn Sears, who died of lung cancer in 2014. Much of Gill's work has taken an elegiac tone of late. The aforementioned "Sad One Comin' On," from his most recent solo album, *Down to My Last Bad Habit*, is a mournful country ballad occasioned by the death of Gill's good friend, country legend George Jones.

"I think ballads are mainly what I do best," Gill reflects. "I grow weary of a lot of hot-shot playing. I love the melancholy side of music. A great ballad is where a vocalist really gets to soar. And a player, too. I find that emotional playing is more interesting than fast playing. The older I get, the more I kind of point there."

Still, when the time comes to whip out some stunning, lightning-fast riffage, "yeah, I'm ready," Gill says with a laugh. And he's certainly got the guitars to suit whatever musical mood strikes him. Comprised of some 150 instruments, his collection is very much a set of working guitarist's instruments. Ever since the Tennessee floods of 2010, which claimed

★ With his 1956 Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins; (opening spread) with his 1942 Martin D-28 herringbone.

a number of Gill's beloved guitars that he kept at Nashville's Soundcheck storage facility, much of the collection now resides in his Nashville home.

"I have a studio in my house," he says. "I like to have a nice array of different guitars available, because I always want different tones for whatever I'm recording. I've never bought anything that didn't feel good or sound good for me. I never tried to acquire a massive collection just for the sake of having a massive collection. Even though this collection is small compared to some of the others traveling around the world, everything I have is quite nice—not a lot of dogs. Even in the vintage market, just because a guitar is old, that doesn't always mean it's great."

Gill grew up in a guitar-centric environment, which ended up shaping his destiny. "My father played a little bit, and he had an old Harmony, a Gibson ES-125, and a banjo, too," Gill recounts. "Those are the first instruments I remember being around as a little kid. My dad also had a little tenor guitar, which was like an ES-125 as well. It only had four strings on it, so it was easy for my little hands to make chords on it. That's where I got going, until my hand got big enough to play all six strings. When I was 10, my father and mother got me for Christmas—in 1967, I think—a red Gibson ES-335 and a Fender Super Reverb amp, and I was on my way. I had my own gear and a red coil cord, and I was a force to be reckoned with."

That guitar, which now resides in the Country Music Hall of Fame, served Gill well in many teenage rock bands. But by the time of his sophomore year in high school, he'd become obsessed with bluegrass music. Shortly after graduating, he acquired a guitar that is still one of the cornerstones of his collection: a 1942 Martin D-28 herringbone in mint condition.

"It cost $2,500 in 1975, which was a lot of money," he recalls. "I traded in a newer Martin I had, a '71 D-41, plus $1,500, and I got that guitar. That was all the money I had in the world—everything I'd saved for my future."

The D-28 was with Gill during his early professional bluegrass tenures with Ricky Skaggs' Boone Creek and Byron Berline's Sundance, a journey that also took him from Oklahoma, where he was born, to Louisville and Los Angeles. Martin guitars have become something of an obsession for Gill, who currently owns some 50 of them. Among them are a 1928 000-45 and a pair of 1936 000-28s, including one in a rare shade-top (sunburst) finish. "I also have two OM-45s, which are extremely rare," he adds. "Rarer than the D-45. Martin only made 41 of the OM-45s."

> "PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE HOW SOULFUL COUNTRY MUSIC CAN BE. IT CAN BE JUST AS SOULFUL AS RAY CHARLES."

One of these, a 1930 model, was a 50th birthday gift from Gill's wife, the contemporary Christian singer and guitarist Amy Grant. "She knows what to get," he says, laughing. "She calls [*Nashville vintage dealer*] George Gruhn or somebody like that and says, 'What doesn't he have that he really likes? What's the nicest thing you've got?'"

Gill's 1936 000-28 shade-top Martin was also a gift from Grant. He returned the favor by buying her a Gibson Nick Lucas model. "She really likes Gibson guitars," he says. "This one was built around the same year as her mother was born, so there's a connection there. I like that kind of thing."

Many guitars in Gill's collection hold a sentimental value for him. He speaks with great fondness of a Martin 00-40 that belonged to Chet Atkins and was given to him shortly after the guitar legend's passing in 2001. "That one's real precious to me," he says. " I like recording with parlor guitars a lot. You're going right into a microphone, so they don't have to be big and loud. I've got a lot of 00 and 000 everything."

Also of great sentimental—not to mention monetary—value is Gill's 1959 sunburst Gibson Les Paul Standard. "I bought the '59 Les Paul from my brother-in-law from my first marriage [*to country singer Janis Oliver*]," he says. "We were great friends, and he owned this great '59 sunburst since 1959. He'd played it his whole life but got sick a couple of years ago. He called me and said, 'There's not much they can do for me. I'm probably not gonna make it. You've always been my favorite guitar player. Will you buy my Les Paul?'

"I didn't have a sunburst Les Paul in my collection, and I previously couldn't justify the expense because I don't play a Les Paul that much. But this one came along and I said, 'There you go.' I got the one I was supposed to have. My friend played it for 40 years, and now it gets to live on and still make music."

Another cornerstone instrument that Gill acquired early in his career is a white 1953 Telecaster that has remained his main guitar throughout his career. "I bought it for $450 in 1978 from a guitar trader who had a store in Oklahoma City, and that's the one guitar I'm most identified with."

Gill got the Tele right around the same time he joined country rock group the Pure Prairie League toward the end of the Seventies. He recorded three albums with Pure Prairie League

★ With his1959 Gibson Les Paul. "My friend played it for 40 years, and now it gets to live on and still make music."

★ Gill's collection includes a 1960 Gibson ES-175 (in hands) with a Charlie Christian neck pickup and a rare Thirties Gibson Advanced Jumbo flattop (on chair).

> I NEVER WANTED TO DO JUST ONE THING OVER AND OVER.

League between 1979 and 1982 when the band initially broke up, and he sang lead on the band's biggest hit, "Let Me Love You Tonight." The 1953 Tele was with Gill when he went solo with his 1984 album, *Turn Me Loose*. It went on to play an integral role in many of his huge Nineties hits such as "Don't Let Our Love Start Slippin' Away," "One More Last Chance," "What the Cowgirls Do," and "You'd Better Think Twice." The guitar can be seen on the cover of his 2011 *Guitar Slinger* album and in many other iconic images.

"I have a lot of blackguard Teles," he says, "and the reason is I've been trying for almost 40 years now to find one that reminds me of my white one. But I've never found it. I got close, but I can't find that neck and that sound. There's just something magical about that guitar. That's still the one I wind up playing. It's really got the thing for me.

"For a long time, I took a lot of pride in never selling instruments and only acquiring them. But at one point I finally got to the place where I said 'Okay, let's look at this logically. You have more than 40 Telecasters.' And there are a lot of people now who are making nice instruments. I try to buy their guitars to help them out and get them going. But at the end of the day, they don't wind up in the everyday arsenal of what I want to play."

In comparison, Gill's Stratocaster collection is fairly modest. "I may have eight or 10 Strats in all," he says. "All great ones—early Sixties and older. My number one right now is a '59 Strat with a slab fingerboard—the first year Fender did slab boards. I got it from Duane Eddy's son. Duane got it new in 1959, but then he decided he was never going to be a Fender player, and he gave it to his son to play. His son played it his whole life, but one day he called me up and said, 'I need to sell this old Strat.' I played it, and it's one of those guitars that you get in your hands and you never forget the sound of it and the way it plays. It trumps all the other Strats I have."

Gill's tastes in vintage Fenders are finely honed. "I find what I like are the neck profiles," he says. "Certain years—'54 through '57—are a little bigger than I like. I tend to like '58, '59 and early '60s. I'm friends with a lot of great

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★ Gill tends to prefer the neck profiles of Fender guitars built during the late Fifties through early Sixties.

vintage guitar dealers across the country and they know what I like. I'm a pretty easy mark.

"I take all my guitars on the road," he adds. "I take my '53 Telecaster, '59 Strat, and '59 sunburst Les Paul. I want those great instruments in my hands when I play live—to be able to sound like I want to sound and have a guitar feel to me the way I want it to feel. They're not doing me much good sitting at home."

While these valuable instruments have escaped harm on the road, Gill's collection took a pretty serious hit in the Tennessee floods of 2010, which struck Nashville particularly hard. His lyrical statement in "Guitar Slinger" that "half my stuff's in the Columbia River" is only a slight exaggeration.

"All told, about 50 guitars were compromised," he says. "Some could be rescued, although not many. Most were ruined. I lost a guitar used on 'One More Last Chance' and a couple of guitars that my friends made for me. Amy gave me a nice, old small-bodied Taylor that I used on a duet I did with her from '93 called 'House of Love.' That one got destroyed. I also lost about 30 old amps and 60 vintage cases. It was a real painful spring-cleaning. But Amy was pretty cool about it. She said, 'You lost all that stuff, but you can make a living with just one guitar.'"

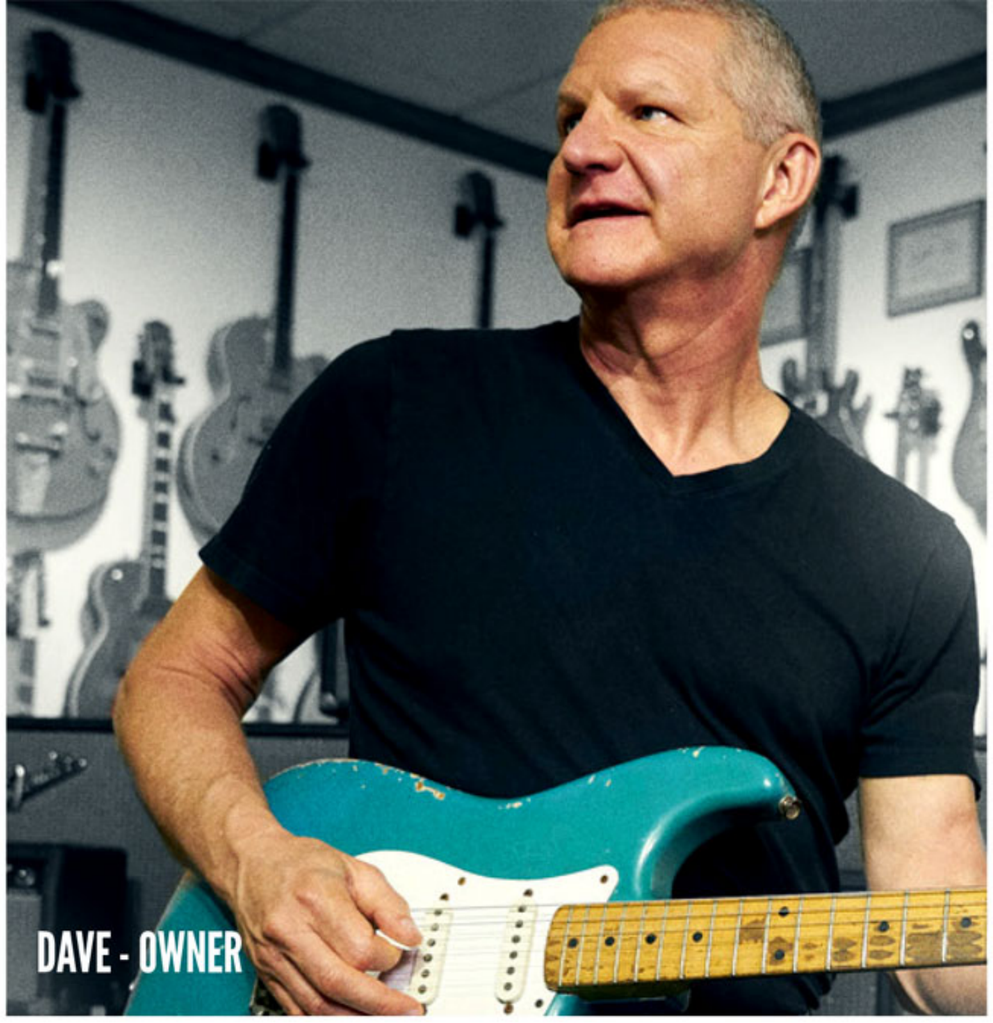
Not that it's come to that. Gill's collection embraces awe-inspiring instruments in just about every category, including mandolins—several of which were made and signed by legendary Gibson designer Lloyd Loar. "I've got a couple of Lloyd Loar F-5s," he says. "I've played mandolin my whole life, and I was never able to pull the trigger on buying a Loar. They always went for crazy money, and the crazy money kept getting crazier and crazier. I thought, If I don't get one of these things now I'm never going to be able to.

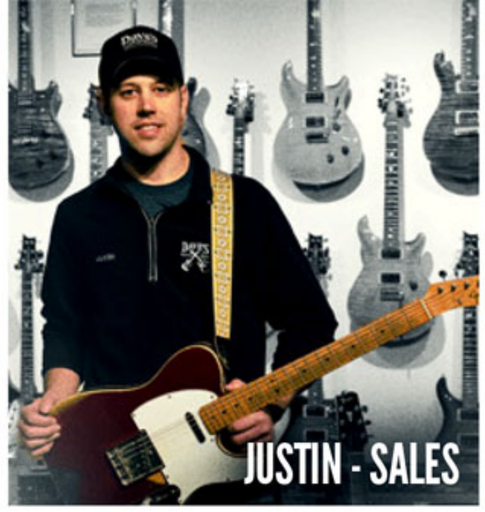
"So I finally bit the bullet and got a couple of amazing Loars towards the height of the boom," he continues. "I've also got a Loar quartet collection: the mandocello, the mandola, the F-5, and L-5 [*guitar*], all signed by Lloyd Loar. There's only eight of those in existence, because Gibson only made eight mandocellos. So that's a pretty rare collection."

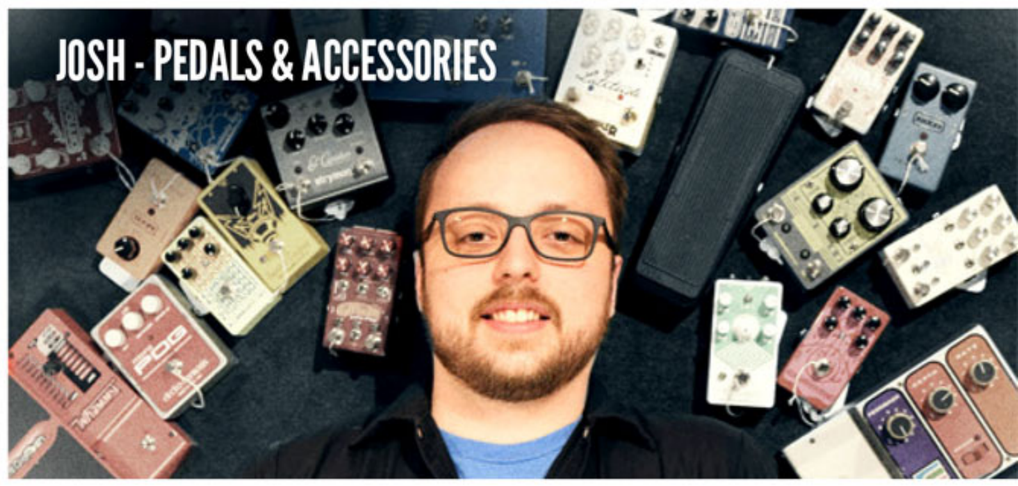
More recently, Gill has been acquiring archtop electrics, including a 1960 Gibson ES-175 that he used to contribute western-swing stylings to the Time Jumpers' *Kid Sister* album. "It has a Charlie Christian pickup in it," he adds. "I've never seen a 175 like that. That, to me, is the best-sounding pickup for swing and those kinds of things. Even better than a PAF. I saw that on Gruhn's website. I called George and said, 'I'll take that one.' It's just the best of all things for that gig."

So is there anything that Gill is still seeking to add to his collection?

"I've pretty much got the basics covered," he says. "But you never know. If another 335 shows up that's even better than the one you have, why wouldn't you want it? That's what I try to do—find something that's even better than what I have. Find a great guitar and it gets to live in a studio, get played all the time, and be a part of your musical life. What could be better than that?" GA







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COMMUNITY COLLECTION

THE SONGBIRDS GUITAR MUSEUM IN CHATTANOOGA EXHIBITS THE BEST INSTRUMENTS FROM PRIVATE COLLECTORS, SHARING THEM IN THE PUBLIC SPOTLIGHT.

BY ALAN DI PERNA

PHOTOS BY JEFF FASANO

"We decided to build a mecca for guitar lovers," Songbirds Guitar Museum curator and COO David Davidson says. Located in Chattanooga, Tennessee, inside the historic Chattanooga Choo Choo Terminal Station, Songbirds is indeed destined to become a pilgrimage site for vintage guitar connoisseurs and music fans in general. With some 550 rare, fascinating, and beautiful electric and acoustic guitars on display as of the museum's March 10 opening, Songbirds represents an interesting new concept in musical instrument museums. There is no permanent collection. Instead the instruments are on loan from many of the world's foremost collectors, who prefer to remain anonymous. Audio-video material, artifacts, and other onsite resources help bring the stories of these exceptional instruments to life.

"I was reluctant to call this place a museum," says Johnny Smith, Songbirds' president and co-founder. "I love museums, but they tend to have an environment that's respectful, quiet, very clean, and polished. I wanted Songbirds to be rock and roll—loud, flashy, and exciting."

Davidson and Smith began formulating the idea for the attraction several years ago. As co-owner of the New York vintage dealership We Buy Guitars, Davidson had cultivated deep connections within the guitar-collecting community, having procured coveted instruments for many collectors. He began to talk to his clients about lending some of their guitars to an institution where they could be viewed and appreciated by the general public.

"It's a way of giving something back to the guitar community," Davidson says. "There are only so many toys someone can have. Although it was not my place to volunteer up their guitars at any point, it really came down to the fact that this was a golden opportunity. Everybody's getting a little bit older and, let's face it, there is no more Beatles. If people were not made aware of vintage guitars for what they are, I feared—we all feared—that, 20 years from now, these things could all be firewood."

The duo began scouting locations for the new museum, eventually settling on Chattanooga. "We looked at many locations, including New York, L.A., Boston, Seattle, and Nashville," Davidson explains. "But we felt that most of these places are saturated with other museums and things to do during the day, whereas Chattanooga is an up-and-coming city."

Creating the museum's space within the historic train station was a $4.5 million project, masterminded by architect Thomas Palmer of the Chattanooga firm Cogent Studio. Layers of plaster and terra cotta tile were removed to reveal the structure's original brickwork and steel beams. In an echo of the interior's architectural features, display cases for the instruments and artifacts were custom-fabricated from steel and reclaimed hardwood by Range Products of Chattanooga.

Of the museum's total 7,500 square feet, about 6,700 are devoted to exhibit space. The instruments on display span the full range of vintage American electric and acoustic guitars and include a selection of banjos and mandolins.

Songbirds cofounders David Davidson and Johnny Smith (right) in front of the impressive display of rare custom color Gibson Firebirds at the museum.

"I WANTED SONGBIRDS TO BE ROCK AND ROLL—LOUD, FLASHY, AND EXCITING."
—JOHNNY SMITH

"It's all vintage—no reissues," Davidson says. "We don't have refinished guitars or guitars that have been modified or damaged and put back together. We take a lot of pride in that." Davidson places the value of the instruments on exhibit at approximately $150 million, which isn't surprising, considering that more than 30 sunburst Gibson Les Pauls from the legendary 1958–'60 period are on display. On the acoustic front, there's a trove of pre-war Martins as well as a trio of 1924 instruments by iconic luthier Lloyd Loar: a Gibson F-5 mandolin, an H-5 mandola, and an L-5 archtop guitar, all with inside labels signed by Loar.

The exhibit space is divided into three galleries. For a general admission fee of $15.95 ($12.95 for seniors and military; free for children under 12), visitors can view the main gallery. This is primarily an educational space that traces the evolution and cultural significance of the electric guitar in the Fifties through the Seventies through some 300 vintage instruments as well as audio, artifacts, and other resources. iPad stations and a custom iBook app provide more detailed information. Planned for the museum's opening are breakout exhibits devoted to the British Invasion, surf music, and bluegrass.

Guitar connoisseurs will want to pony up $36 for the museum's all-access tour, which includes the main gallery as well as a guided tour of two additional galleries. One of these, known as the Green Room, is the site of an exhibit titled "The World of Color," featuring a stunning array of custom-color vintage Telecasters and Stratocasters that represents, according to Davidson, "virtually every color Fender made." This is accompanied by a comprehensive selection of custom-color Gibsons, including a large number of Firebird guitars and Thunderbird basses. The Green Room is also designed to host intimate concerts and other events.

The museum's third gallery, known as the Vault, has about 75 guitars on exhibit. "These are prototypes, one-offs, and employee-built guitars from the factories back in the Fifties and Sixties," Davidson says. "There are many things that people would never see otherwise."

One highlight of the Vault is an ultra-rare Fender "Pinecaster," an Esquire/Broadcaster prototype from 1950 with a pine body, non-truss-rod neck and two lap-steel pickups. Painted red and bearing the serial number 0009, it's thought to be the first-ever dual-pickup Esquire/Broadcaster prototype. (For a very brief period, Fender used the name Esquire for both single- and dual-pickup models before adopting the name Broadcaster for dual-pickup guitars.)

"It was a test instrument for Fender for many years," Davidson says. "It probably has about 20 different coats of paint on it from down through the years. It was in the Fender Museum for a while, and it had seen a bit of travel before it came to us."

Also on exhibit in the Vault are a 1954 Stratocaster belonging to key Fender employee George Fullerton and a custom black 1954 Strat owned by guitar ace and early Fender endorsee Jimmy Bryant. Several prototypes from the hand of legendary German luthier Roger Rossmeisl's post-Rickenbacker period at Fender are on display, including a hollowbody Stratocaster prototype and an early Thinline Telecaster prototype in Wildwood Green with two f-holes and block fretboard inlays. From Gibson's history comes a 1954 Les Paul Custom with a chambered body, reflecting an early effort on Gibson's part to make the Les Paul lighter.

The guitars currently on display at Songbirds include celebrity instruments like these guitars once owned by Roy Orbison, Buddy Guy, Robby Krieger, and Bo Diddley (left), and a variety of cool and unusual Gretsch guitars (right).

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> "THESE INSTRUMENTS DO NOT LIVE BEHIND GLASS PERMANENTLY."
> —JOHNNY SMITH

One unique feature of both the Green Room and the Vault is that visitors deemed qualified by the tour guide might be given an opportunity to handle and play some of the guitars on exhibit. This is one feature that makes Songbirds a little bit like a vintage guitar shop rather than a traditional museum. Along these same lines is Songbirds' vintage guitar appraisal partnership with Davidson's We Buy Guitars.

"We don't sell any guitars at the museum," Davidson clarifies. "But We Buy Guitars will have an appraisal and buying office there. A well-trained appraiser will be there to look at things like condition and originality. If we're interested in buying a guitar, it will be shipped to We Buy Guitars in New York or added to the museum's collection."

While arrangements such as these might elicit cringes on the part of traditional museum professionals—not to mention owners of rival vintage guitar shops—they do promise an enhanced guest experience for guitar geeks who visit Songbirds. Smith admits that the museum's unique concept did make it a difficult sell at first for potential investors and others.

"It was kind of tough saying, 'Here in Tennessee, we've got one of the best guitar collections that has ever been assembled in the world on display.' It was hard for people to wrap their heads around it."

But that began to change when legendary country guitarist and noted collector Vince Gill signed on as the museum's ambassador. He performed at a pre-opening party at Songbirds on March 9, and museum guests will be greeted by a welcome video that Gill taped for the museum, played on a giant 16-by-eight-foot LED screen at the museum's entry.

"I'm really just a hood ornament at this point," Gill says with typical self-deprecating humor. "This is an unbelievable collection. It's staggering. I'm anxious just to get the feel of this stuff and play some of it."

Gill also curated a display case exhibiting 15 iconic guitars from the museum's collection that parallel instruments from Gill's own personal collection. These include a 1938 Gibson Advanced Jumbo, a 1939 Martin 000-45, a 1950 Broadcaster, a 1954 Stratocaster, a 1956 Gretsch Sparkle Jet, and a 1959 Gibson Les Paul.

"I picked out instruments from the museum's collection that I really liked and that had a personal connection to me," Gill says. "I just wanted to parallel the things I have."

One might describe Songbirds as the first guitar museum created by guitar aficionados for guitar aficionados. "One of the criticisms of guitar museums in general is that the guitars behind glass should be played," Smith says. "We want people to know that these instruments do not live behind glass permanently. We have plans to rotate the exhibits, because the guys who own these guitars want them back to play them. And that also means there will be something new to see here every time you come back." GA

(clockwise from top right) An assortment of 1924 Gibson Master Model instruments with labels signed by Lloyd Loar and early Gibson flattops; custom color Fender Jazz and Precision basses; various Gibson Super 400s, including one with a unique original bright-green custom finish.

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WRITTEN BY **JOE BOSSO**

PHOTOS BY **JEFF FASANO**

There is no doubt you've heard Brent Mason play guitar. He's appeared on records by Alan Jackson, Dolly Parton, Tim McGraw, Brooks & Dunn, Vince Gill, and Trisha Yearwood, as well as hundreds of others. His work has been heard in dozens of movies released over the past 25 years, including *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *A Few Good Men*, and *The Thing Called Love*, as well as on such TV shows as *Friends*, *Becker*, and *King of the Hill*. His guitar playing even appears during commercial breaks for products that include Budweiser, Country Time Lemonade, Dodge Trucks, Revlon, and countless other.

Since arriving in Nashville in the early Eighties, Mason has put his impeccable chops and uncanny versatility to ubiquitous use, making the multiple award winner Music City's first-call picker and one of the most recorded guitarists in history.

Why have so many top-flight stars and producers called upon Mason's services?

"Man, I wish I could tell you," he says with a laugh. "Then I could bottle it and sell it."

Mason launches into a story about how, several years ago, he heard some fine guitar playing while relaxing on his back deck. "My neighbor was cranking tunes next door, and the music was coming out through his opened windows," he says. "This song by Alabama came on, and man, the guitar solo was hot. Some guy was playing a Tele and doing three-part harmonies. I was like, 'Wow, that guy's good.' Then it dawned on me: 'Wait a minute. That's me! I sound amazing.' I've done so many sessions, I forget 'em sometimes."

Pausing a moment to reflect, Mason offers this assessment of his popularity among artists and producers. "I think it all comes down to timing, like so many things," he says. "I was the right player at the right time when I hit Nashville." He chuckles. "Of course, I had to wait a little while for people to realize that, but once they did get an earful of what I could do, it sounded right to them."

What sounded right to so many Nashville record makers was the fact that Mason, along with cohorts like bassist Glenn Worf and drummer Lonnie Wilson, didn't fit in with the pristine, direct-recorded sound that had become *de rigueur* on country-oriented albums during much of the Eighties. "They were doing a lot of things digitally, and they had stopped using amps on records," Mason recalls. "You plug straight into the board, and that takes the edge off the guitar. I don't want to sound derogatory, but they were making records sound a little fluffy and sweet—a little too…polite.

"So what we did was try to bring in more of a raucous sound, like you just walked into a club and were hearing a band tear it up. I'd go to sessions with an old, smoky amp, and I brought the roadhouse with me. That sounded pretty good with Brooks & Dunn, Alan Jackson, and all the others."

Mason's path to session-king status began early. Growing up in Grover Hill, Ohio, ("It was farmland in the middle of nowhere," he says. "The nearest city was Fort Wayne, Indiana"), he picked up the guitar at the age of five and taught himself to play by listening to listening to records by Merle Haggard, Chet Atkins, and Buck Owens. When Mason's father, a keen country music fan, brought home a copy of Jerry Reed's *Nashville Underground*, the effect it had on his young son was profound. "Jerry was unbelievable," Mason enthuses. "Such command of the guitar—I was blown away. I studied him like you wouldn't believe, just copying every lick he played. He became a real idol of mine."

Shunning lessons, Mason continued his private study course into his teens, copying guitar parts off

(here and opening page) Mason at his Nashville home with a Gretsch Duane Eddy signature model.

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SUPER SESSIONS

BRENT MASON MIGHT NOT RECALL EVERY SONG HE'S PLAYED ON, BUT HE DEFINITELY REMEMBERS THE **ARTISTS** HE'S RECORDED WITH. HERE, HE REFLECTS ON FOUR OF THE BIGGEST NAMES WHO HAVE CALLED UPON HIS SERVICES OVER THE YEARS.

BROOKS & DUNN

"They were both running around trying to get record deals. They got together and did a duo thing, and that's what totally clicked. I did 'Boot Scootin' Boogie' with them, and it became a big, big hit. It was a lot of fun. They're pretty easygoing guys, and they just loved the live sound we got for them. They gave me a few ideas of what they were looking for. I remember they said, 'We want this to be country, but we wanna sound a little Tom Petty, too.' I was like, 'Okay, I know what you're going for.' I goofed around with some opening licks, and they went, 'That's it! Play it like that.' They let me experiment and come up with stuff. That's always the best way: They hire you to be you, and then they let you collaborate on the sound."

REBA MCENTIRE

"Reba's a sweetheart. There's no prima donna factor there at all—she's real down-home folks. She always remembers everybody's name, and she compliments you when you play something good. I've played on quite a few of her albums. She's got great producers—Tony Brown, James Stroud. James is a well-known guy and he's also a drummer. He played on a lot of pop records in the Seventies. It's always good to work with a producer who's also a musician—they have the best musical ideas. James is very rhythmic, so he talks to you about accents and stops. Tony is more of the kind of guy who'll just turn you loose and see what you do. He never says, 'Play this verbatim.' The records come out better that way because they become something nobody imagined before."

BRAD PAISLEY

"I played on a song called 'Cluster Pluck,' which was featured on Brad's instrumental album, *Play*. It was kind of a compilation of Brad's favorite players. I don't normally record with Brad, but I was really thrilled to be asked to be a part of this one. The song was pretty heavy with guitarists—John Jorgenson, Vince Gill, James Burton, Albert Lee. Not bad company. I didn't actually play alongside with Brad in the studio; I just came in and overdubbed my parts. He sat in the control room with me while I ran a few solos down. I basically harmonized with his signature melody line. He had a very edgy, grungy tone, so I plugged my Tele into a Deluxe and went for more of a vintage clean sound. It was a lot of fun. I've known Brad a long time, and I'm the first to say he doesn't need me on his records. He plays his ass off on everything he does."

TIM MCGRAW

"Tim is amazing to work with. He'll have a definite vision of the song you're cutting with him. He'll say, 'I want it to sound like this, but can you make it sound more natural there?' He likes more of a rockin' sound. He'll talk about the tones and the dynamics, and I'll make notes. Then he'll kind of disappear in the studio and Byron Gallimore, his producer, will come out. While Tim is getting ready to sing, Byron will take the reins and work with you on the music. It's funny, though: Sometimes we'll start a song and they'll go, 'Nah!' And they'll move on to something else. Things can be very spontaneous with those two. I've played on Faith Hill's stuff, too, like that big hit 'Breathe,' and some songs that she and Tim did together. They're great people."

records and studying album sleeves for credits. "I committed everything to memory," he says. "I was more impressed with the session guys than the actual stars on the front cover. I listened to what Reggie Young was doing," he says, referring to the guitarist heard on tracks by everyone from Elvis Presley to Johnny Cash to Willie Nelson. "I picked apart his licks. And Roy Nichols, who played with Merle—I was listening to him. I was already grooming myself to be a session player. I just wanted to come to Nashville, where it was like a melting pot of everything. I wasn't sure how I was going to go about it, but I wanted to get into the business somehow."

Mason arrived in Nashville after completing high school. Armed with his first electric guitar, a Hagstrom, he set out on his mission to infiltrate the studio session scene. "It's like a club nobody invites you to join," he observes. "You have to crash your way in."

With doors not exactly swinging open, Mason hit the nightclubs, landing a steady gig with a local Top 40 outfit, the Don Kelley Band. "I figured I stood a good chance of getting noticed if people saw me playing live," Mason explains. "This went on for a few years." During this time, he sidelined his Hagstrom for a 1968 Telecaster that he purchased for $300 at Hewgley's Music Shop just outside of Nashville. "I really wanted a Les Paul and a Tele, but I couldn't afford both," he explains. "So I stuck a mini humbucker in the neck position and had two single-coils in the middle and bridge. It worked really well. I played that guitar for years."

> "I'D GO TO SESSIONS WITH AN OLD, SMOKY AMP, AND I BROUGHT THE ROADHOUSE WITH ME."

Just when it seemed as if Mason's club tenure would continue indefinitely, opportunity came knocking in the most unexpected of ways. Chet Atkins, who was working on a record called *Stay Tuned* on which he played alongside other guitar greats, walked into a club with his buddy George Benson. The two were suitably impressed by Mason's playing, and after the set Atkins approached the

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unknown guitarist and asked him if he'd like to play on song that would also feature Mark Knopfler. "It was crazy," Mason says with a laugh. "I was looking at my calendar book and trying to act cool, like, 'Yeah, I think I could fit that in…' Meanwhile, I'm flipping out. It was like, Are you kidding? This can't be happening!"

Mason's lively playing on the jazz-rock "Some Leather and Lace" neatly complemented the nimble lines of Atkins and Knopfler, and it was the first real signal to Nashville's music elite that an exciting new talent was in their midst.

But the guitarist had another trick up his sleeve: his songwriting. "I was recording demos of my songs, which people liked, but they all said the same thing: 'Hey, who's playing guitar on that?'" he recalls. "Pretty soon, people started asking me to play on their records." The floodgates opened in a major way after Keith Whitley not only decided to record one of Mason's originals, "Heartbreak Highway," but also asked the guitarist to play on the track. (Sadly, the cut appeared on Whitley's 1989 album, *I Wonder Do You Think of Me*, which was released three months after his alcohol-related death.)

Starting in the early Nineties, country music began to dominate the *Billboard* charts, and for the next couple of decades Mason was living the studio life that he had dreamed about as a teenager. "Every room in town was booked night and day," he says. "I was working all the time. One week I'd do a Tim McGraw album, another week I'd have Faith Hill, and then the next week I'd be working with Lee Ann Womack. Then it would be Alan Jackson or Brooks & Dunn, and then it'd be Reba McEntire. It went like that for years. I used to read about how things were with the Wrecking Crew back in the Sixties. We were experiencing the same kind of thing."

Depending on the gig, Mason would bring anywhere from a handful to as many as 30 different guitars to a session—"a nice mix of Teles, Strats, Les Pauls, Ricks, and 335s," he says. The core of his current working arsenal includes his beloved 1968 Telecaster along with an early Fifties model, as well as a 1965 Strat, a couple of 335s (a 1967 and a 1968), a 1972 Les Paul Gold Top, a Gretsch G6120DE Duane Eddy signature hollow body, a white 1972 Gibson SG, and a Charles Whitfill baritone guitar. The Nashville flood of 2010 wiped out some of Mason's most treasured instruments, including a Jerry Jones baritone and a late-Sixties Rickenbacker 12-string. For a time, he tried to make do at sessions with some replacement models procured by luthier and friend Joe Glaser. One day, Paul Reed Smith rep Herb Shucher showed up at the studio with some of the company's goodies for Mason to try out, a meeting that the guitarist calls "one of those 'where have you been all my life?' moments."

"I knew that David Grissom and Kenny Greenberg had been playing PRS guitars on records, and I thought they sounded good," Mason says. "Herb gave me a Grissom model, a baritone, and a 12-string to try out, and I was like, 'Man, I'm digging these! I can use them.'" Mason quickly added a pair of DGT guitars, along with the custom baritone, the PRS Hollowbody 12, and a PRS 305 to his studio toolkit, and after a visit to the company's factory in Maryland, he and Paul Reed Smith began working on a Brent Mason signature guitar.

"The one thing I didn't say was, 'Make me a Tele,' because that's been done," Mason explains. "I was thinking about making a really versatile guitar that musicians would love to play, one with a lot of good tones. We put these 408N pickups in the treble and bass and a 305 single-coil in the middle. You've got the whole array of tones available to

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Mason's 1968 Telecaster (foreground) remains his main "go-to" guitar.

you, and you can flip from double-coil to single without losing any volume." He now uses his signature model regularly on sessions ("It's great for solos") and hints that an update is on the horizon. "We're developing something new, but I can't talk about it yet."

When called upon to play acoustic, Mason relies on a few stalwarts—a Daniel Roberts custom BH J-45, a McPherson custom, and cutaway models from Taylor and Takamine. For amps, he sometimes uses a Matchless DC-30 Series combo, but he's partial to a pair of Fender Bassman heads he's used for years—a 1967 blackface and a 1965 model—that he puts through a couple of Fender 2x12 Bassman cabinets. "One has Celestion Vintage 30s in it, and the other has these Warehouse speakers. You stick a Royer or a Shure 57 in front of it and you get a huge vintage sound."

He claims to never have been much of an effects guy, and he scrupulously avoided racks, but he admits that sometimes the odd boutique analog stomp box adds the right touch of grit to digital recording.

"You see more and more boutique pedals these days, with me and a bunch of other guys," he notes. "And there's some other changes coming in with that Florida Georgia Line thing. Guys are playing more Slash- or Metallica-type solos with hillbilly melodies, and there's even some rap stuff. They're still singing about trucks, but it's like more of a metal vibe. There's a lot of Marshalls being brought in to sessions." He pauses, then adds, "I was never a big fan of hybrid music. It's like rock 'n' roll, but not really."

Although he has released two exceptional solo records, 1997's *Hot Wired* and *Smokin' Section* from 2006, Mason says that he's happy to make his bread and butter as a sideman. The changing landscape of the music industry that shut down marquee recording studios in New York, Los Angeles, and London has finally made its way to Nashville, and the guitarist observes that big-ticket session work isn't what it used to be. "There aren't as many sit-down rhythm tracks anymore," he says. "We used to set up for a whole week to do an album. Now producers might only book one day to cut two songs that people are excited about. Then you'll get called back in two or three months to do a couple more songs. Records aren't done in one big stretch like before. The whole scene is like that.

"On the other hand, there's lots of different work out there," he continues. "Because of the capabilities of computers, people can do demos or cut tracks at home. Nashville is kind of like L.A. now, with producers working in their cubbyholes and sending files out. I do lots of overdub work on stuff people send me, and I get it from all over the world. What's cool is, the clock isn't ticking. I can cut multiple tracks of something and send it back—'Here, you pick which one you want.' So the world is a little different, but I'm still playing and working, and I'm still getting paid for it. That's all I ever wanted." GA

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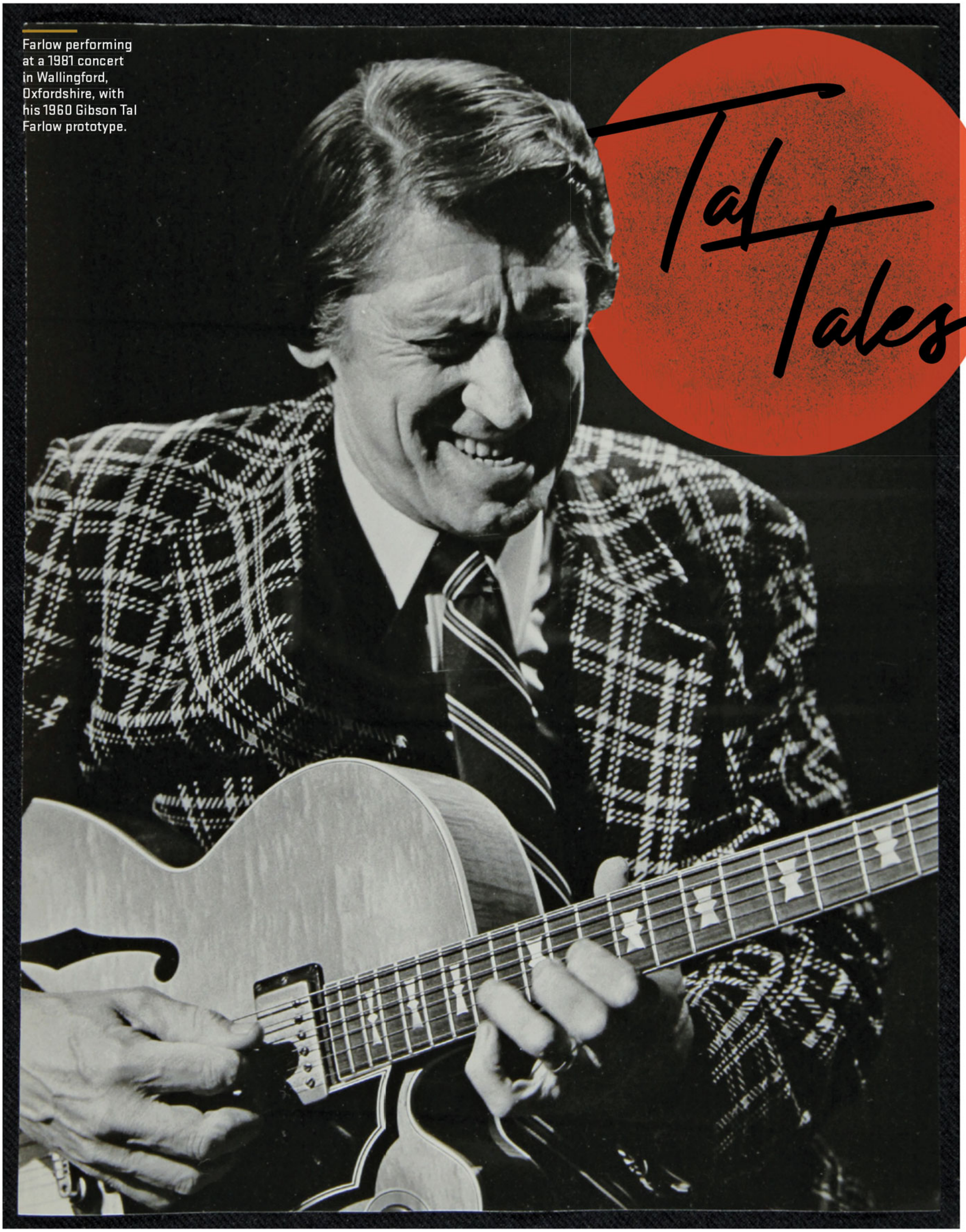


Farlow performing at a 1981 concert in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, with his 1960 Gibson Tal Farlow prototype.

ARTIST: DENIS WILLIAMS; PHOTO: NATIONAL JAZZ ARCHIVE/HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

A COLLECTION OF SEVEN GUITARS OWNED BY TAL FARLOW REVEALS THAT THE JAZZ GIANT WAS EQUALLY VISIONARY AS A PLAYER AND GUITAR DESIGN INNOVATOR.

WRITTEN BY Mac Randall PHOTOGRAPHY BY Justin Borucki

SOME GUITAR PLAYERS will choose an instrument, stick with it for years, and never alter it in any way. Others are habitual tinkerers, always on the lookout for that one extra modification that could improve on what they've already got. The great Tal Farlow, who lived from 1921 to 1998, was one of the latter.

To connoisseurs of jazz guitar, Farlow will always be remembered for his rapid-fire single-note runs, mastery of rake harmonics, and frequent use of his left-hand thumb to cover the bottom two strings on the fretboard, creating a thick stew of intervals that can be heard on more than 30 albums he recorded as a leader (including 1957's *The Swinging Guitar of Tal Farlow* and 1983's *Cookin' on All Burners*), as well as sessions with clarinetist Artie Shaw, vibraphonist Red Norvo, and numerous others. To those who have a fondness for electric archtops, Farlow is famous for his Gibson signature model, introduced in 1962 alongside two other Gibson signature hollowbody jazz boxes named after Johnny Smith and Barney Kessel and produced until 1967, with the last example shipped in 1969. Farlow worked closely with Gibson for many months in the early Sixties to perfect this guitar's design, but that was just the culmination of more than a decade of unusual experiments.

In 1945, when he was gigging around the East Coast of the U.S. with pianist Dardanelle Hadley's trio—and absorbing, in person at various New York City nightclubs, the bebop innovations of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie that would deeply influence his playing style—Farlow bought his first of many Gibson guitars, a 1939 ES-250 with a chocolate brown/golden sunburst finish and one Charlie Christian–style bar pickup in the neck position. This was the guitar that Farlow would play on all the hallowed trio recordings he cut in 1950 and 1951 with Norvo and bassist Charles Mingus. But by the time that happened, the 250 had undergone significant alterations by Los Angeles luthier Milt Owen, at its owner's request.

"I had [*Owen*] take the fingerboard off, put a new one on, and eliminate the first fret—move the whole thing up toward the nut, including the bridge," Farlow explained in a 1981 interview with the magazine *Crescendo*. "By eliminating that first fret, it makes the scale shorter by an inch and a quarter. Well, when you do that up there at the [*original*] 12th fret, you gain two frets—because they're half the size up there. It's [*originally*] 14 frets clear of the body; doing that makes it go up to 16. And that guitar wasn't a cutaway…so it enabled me to reach higher notes without buying a new guitar!"

Given the large size of Farlow's hands—not for nothing was he nicknamed The Octopus—it may have seemed a little odd that he was choosing to create a short-scale guitar for himself. Even more unusual was the fact that the modified neck had 24 frets—considerably more than the 20-fret necks on most Gibson archtop models at the time. But that easier access to the high notes and extended range certainly had an effect on his groundbreaking, harmonically ultra-advanced work with Norvo and Mingus (which you can hear on the excellent two-CD compilation *The Modern Red Norvo*).

A short while after making the last of those recordings, Farlow received a brand-new ES-350 directly from Gibson, initiating a relationship with the company that would last the rest of his life. At some point in the mid Fifties, Farlow replaced the ES-350's P-90 neck pickup with a Charlie Christian pickup, as seen on the cover of his 1957 album, *The Swinging Guitar of Tal Farlow*. He retired the 250 from active service after acquiring the ES-350, giving it to his amateur-musician father Clarence. Apparently, the senior Mr. Farlow was also a tinkerer; at some point, he decided to bring the guitar back to its original specs. His efforts only succeeded in making it unplayable, and thus it languished for decades.

Now that historic ES-250, carefully restored to its previous customized condition, will take its place alongside six other Gibsons from Farlow's collection—including the second prototype of the venerated archtop model that bears his name—as part of a special one-week exhibit at Rudy's Music SoHo in Manhattan at the end of April. It will be the first time in nearly 20 years that more than a handful of people have laid eyes on these guitars. And yes, they will all be for sale.

Last summer, after long deliberation, Farlow's widow Michele Hyk-Farlow decided that she needed to do something about her husband's guitars. Not being a guitar player herself, she had no use for them. And though a few guitarist pals like jazz great Jack Wilkins had occasionally come to the couple's house in New Jersey near Philadelphia to play them, they were otherwise unused since Tal's death. So what to do? "Some of the auction houses no longer deal with guitars, and I certainly couldn't sell them by myself," she says. "Several people suggested that Rudy might be the person to handle it."

That would be Rudy Pensa, owner of Rudy's Music. Soon after Hyk-Farlow called him, he made the trip to her home to evaluate the guitars. "When I first looked at them, I was shaking," he recalls. "I never met Tal Farlow, but I knew his reputation. And these guitars were all just as

he'd left them when he died. I was holding them, and I could see even the strings hadn't been changed. Some of them needed refurbishing, particularly the ES-250, but we didn't want to kill their patina. These guitars had been *played*, and people don't appreciate it if you do too much. Tal had painted around the f-holes on the 250"—another custom touch—"and of course there was the refretting [*Milt Owen's handiwork*]. We haven't changed any of that."

Besides the 250, the most noteworthy guitar in the Rudy's exhibition is the second Tal Farlow prototype from 1960, which Farlow played regularly from the day he received it until his passing. He called it The Blonde because of its unusual natural color, which was actually originally a light red-brown sunburst finish that had faded significantly over time. [*Farlow described its color as "on the orange side" in an interview published in the July 1980 issue of* Guitar Player *magazine*.] Original Tal Farlows are a rarity in themselves, as Gibson produced only 215 of them between 1962 and 1967, but this one is obviously one of a kind.

Several other features besides the faded finish distinguish it from production models, including the placement of the pickup toggle switch on the cutaway horn rather than below the pickguard; the target, or bulls-eye, inlay surrounding the toggle switch; the single crown inlay on the headstock instead of the Tal Farlow model's standard double mirror-image crown inlay; bowtie inlays on the fretboard instead of the inverted crest (or pineapple) SJ-200-style inlays; and an entirely different style tailpiece block with Farlow's name engraved in laminated black and white plastic instead of pearl.

One fascinating oddity in the collection is a 3/4-size 1951 ES-140 that's been almost entirely painted bright red, including the fretboard, headstock overlay, pickguard, and single P-90 pickup cover. Farlow asked Gibson for this bizarre paint job when the Red Norvo Trio was hired to back up singer Mel Tormé on his new CBS TV show, which was the first to ever be broadcast in color.

"The producer of the show came in and told everyone how we needed to have the best and brightest colors and so forth, and that he wanted to paint our instruments red," Farlow remembered in a 1990 interview with *Vintage Guitar*. "However, the show got canceled after only a few weeks, so I forgot about the guitar and didn't think anything more of it. About six months later, I get a call from Gibson, saying that they had this guitar there, and did I want it? I told them that I had no more use for it, but they said, 'Just tell us where to send it. We'll give it to you and write it off as advertising.'"

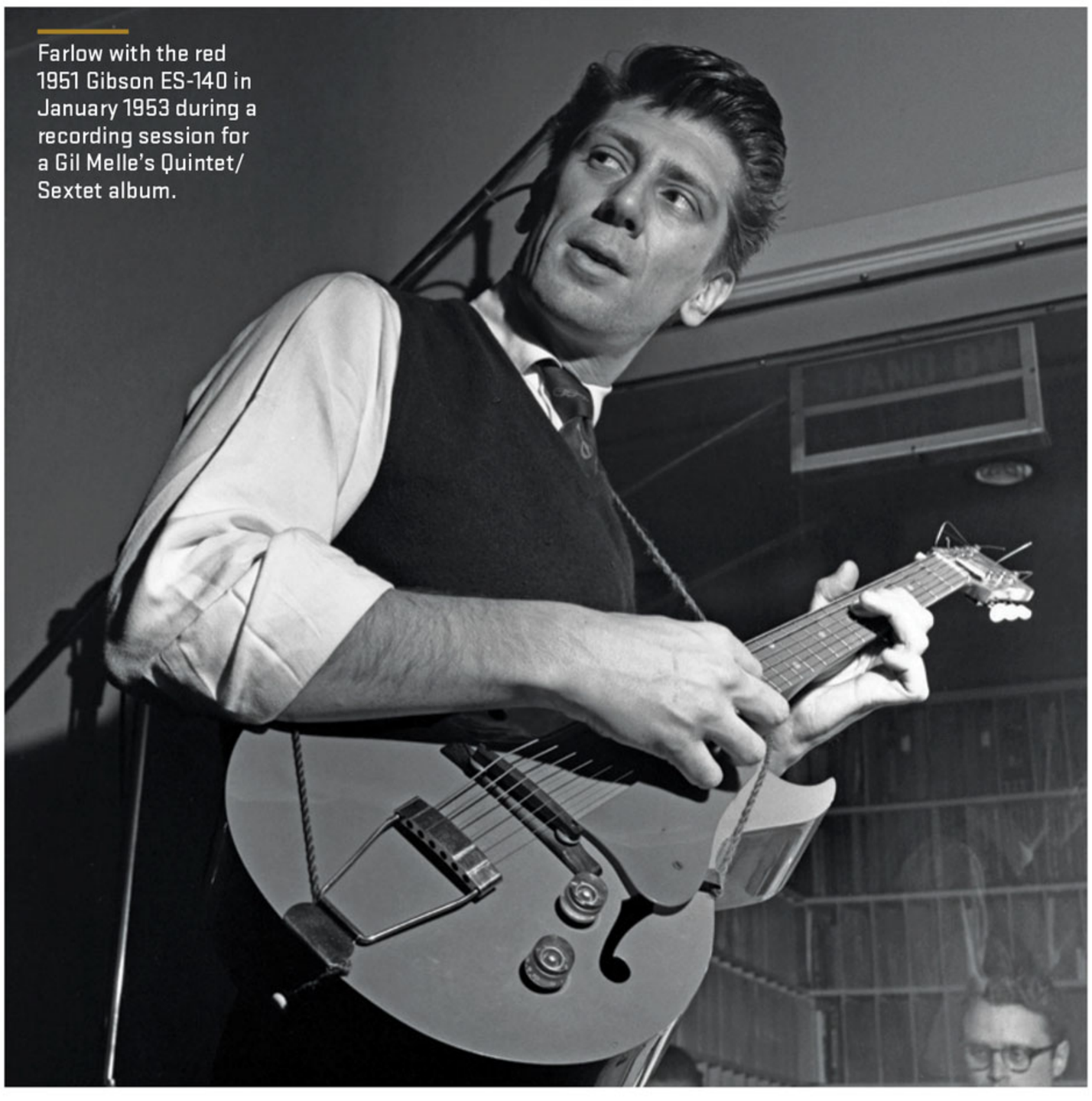
The other guitars featured in the Rudy's Music exhibit are four more recent Tal Farlow model guitars built for their namesake by Gibson's Custom Shop, which officially reissued the Tal Farlow model in 1993. They include a Viceroy Brown 1987 model (SN 82937591), a Tobacco Sunburst from 1993, and two Viceroy Browns from 1996 (SN 910166007 and 92296003). Only three major Tal-related guitars can't be found here: the first Tal Farlow prototype, which was returned to the Gibson factory in 1960 due to Farlow's dissatisfaction with it; the third Tal Farlow prototype, featuring a tobacco sunburst finish—Farlow's principal live instrument for 17 years, it was stolen at Newark Airport following a 1978 flight from San Francisco and never recovered; and his early Fifties ES-350, pictured on several album covers, whose whereabouts are currently unknown (although Farlow mentioned still having it in his 1980 *Guitar Player* interview).

Guitars aren't the only Farlow items that Rudy's will be showing. Another example of his ceaseless tinkering is the cushioned bar stool that he customized in the early Seventies by fitting it with a small Walter Woods amplifier and volume pedal. Farlow pitched a slightly more complex version of this "amp you can sit on" design to Gibson in the Sixties, but they passed on it. He went ahead and built one anyway, using it frequently at local New Jersey gigs.

After the Fifties, Farlow's engagement with the music business was a reluctant one. Although he recorded and toured sporadically, he also dropped out of the action for long stretches, often choosing to concentrate on his other trade: commercial sign painting. But he never stopped playing, and the seven guitars in his collection—even the newer ones—were clearly well-loved.

"It's my hope that they all find wonderful homes because they were very much appreciated," Hyk-Farlow says. "It would be lovely if they went to a museum eventually, but whatever happens to them, I just know they don't belong with me any longer. Tal was a special human being and I was very lucky to have met him, let alone share life with him. I'm just trying my best to make sure his name continues to be recognized and his music continues to be enjoyed."

Tal Farlow's guitars will be on display at Rudy's SoHo showroom from April 24 through April 29. GA



Farlow with the red 1951 Gibson ES-140 in January 1953 during a recording session for a Gil Melle's Quintet/ Sextet album.

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Tal Farlow GUITAR GALLERY

(top) Farlow's 1960 Gibson Tal Farlow prototype rests upon his custom performance stool. (inset) The circuitboard from a Boss OC-2 Octaver that was driven by the guitar's middle pickup. (bottom left) Unusual details include bowtie fretboard inlays, bull's-eye binding surrounding the pickup switch, and a third pickup. (bottom right) The prototype's tailpiece with unique nameplate.

This Viceroy Brown 1987 Tal Farlow signature model guitar built by Gibson's Custom Shop features gold-plated hardware instead of nickel plating.

The 1993 Gibson Custom Shop Tal Farlow guitar with Tobacco Sunburst finish. (inset) The truss-rod cover is engraved with Farlow's name.

Farlow's 1951 Gibson ES-140 with one-of-a-kind custom red finish. The Tune-o-matic bridge and tuners were later modifications.

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This Tal Farlow signature model (SN 92296003) is one of two nearly identical guitars that Gibson's Custom Shop made for Tal in 1996. The main differences are that the other example (SN 91016007, not shown) has bridge inlays and a plain truss-rod cover. (inset) The standard Tal Farlow trapeze tailpiece is an ES-175 raised triple-parallelogram tailpiece with rosewood insert and Farlow's name engraved on a mother-of-pearl block inlay.

Farlow's customized 1939 Gibson ES-250, with short-scale 24-fret neck and L-5 tailpiece. (inset) After the ES-250's headstock binding deteriorated, Farlow simply painted the edges.

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Case Study

BUILDING A CASE FOR A GIBSON HARP GUITAR WAS ANYTHING BUT OPEN AND SHUT.

{ *BY FLIP SCIPIO* }

LAST ISSUE, I told the tale of an extraordinary modified Gibson Style U harp guitar that dodged a fiery death at Søren Venema's Palm Guitars in Amsterdam. Its modifications included a small headstock from a bandura—the traditional Ukrainian zither harp—in place of the usual harp-string extension, along with an integrated bridge and tailpiece that allowed individual tuning of all 12 harp strings behind the bridge. The guitar astounded me when I first saw it three years ago, and it astounded me again when it suddenly appeared in my shop sometime after the fire, where I'd assumed it had perished. As it happened, the instrument was on loan to world musician Shahzad Ismaily at the time of the blaze, or it would surely have been among the instruments lost.

The coda to this tale has an interesting twist. Shahzad paid Søren for the guitar and managed to get the fat Gibson in its soft faux-leather bag through four intercontinental flights unscathed—a monumental feat. I'm considerably more cautious, having just returned myself from a trip to Colombia with my beloved classical guitar in a spanky new Hoffee carbon fiber flight case thrown in with the suitcases. If you knew how far and wide Shahzad typically traveled, you could imagine my astonishment when I saw him walking into my Brooklyn shop with that distinctive infernal brown bag. I simply marveled at this wonderful freak of circumstance that had survived more abuse than a New York City public telephone booth.

Though the guitar still needed minor repair work, it was with me mainly to be fitted for a custom case that would protect it from further harm. Long ago, in a galaxy far away, I obtained cases from a company called Harptone, who built them in the Seventies through the Nineties out of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, one of those places in New York where one still could use notoriously explosive, acetone-based glue to attach the fuzzy lining to the plywood outer shells. You could order any case you'd like in a bewildering choice of cover materials, custom-colored inside linings, and shell thicknesses—all you had to do was provide a dependable drawing of your guitar. Here lied the rub with custom Harptone case making: They would use your drawing as a pattern, cutting it up and gluing it onto the shell material, which meant you would have to make an entirely new drawing every time you needed an odd-size case.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FLIP SCIPIO

After Harptone ceased production, most of its services were taken over by the TKL/Cedar Creek company in Oilville, Virginia, who have made a number of odd-size cases for me with very good results. All cases fit upon arrival, and the cherry on top is that their system memorizes all previous orders, so all they have to do is pull my file to make a second alligator form-fitting case with a Con Edison–blue interior for my Teisco Spectrum guitar.

The art of making a reliable case drawing for a straightforward guitar became a bit easier in the computer age. In addition to indicating the instrument's silhouette, one simply fills out the factory's thorough spec sheet with reasonable precision. However, for a multi-angled instrument like our Gibson U harp, with its complicated arched surfaces, the process still requires meticulous drawing skills, particularly since once the case is made and delivered the case maker usually won't take it back. It took me about five hours to come up with a reliable three-dimensional depiction of this oddball guitar, the specs of which I copied for future reference before sending it off to TKL.

Three months later, a humongous box arrived and I was enjoying the anticipation of lowering the guitar into its new abode. Would it fit in the case? When I strummed the strings and closed the lid, would the strings keep ringing until the lid fully closed? Or would they dampen with the lid only three-quarters closed, which would mean the case was too shallow and the top could be severely damaged by the bridge if excess force was applied on the case lid? (This is especially important for resophonic guitar cases, which need a bit of extra space to protect the fragile aluminum cones from excess downward pressure.)

As it turned out, the harp guitar gave the TKL case a big thumbs up. When it's not being enjoyed in Shazad's Figure 8 studio in Brooklyn, this wonderful black Gibson snoozes comfortably in enough pink velour lining to make a three-piece suit with a cummerbund. GA

Many thanks to Shahzad Ismaily, Søren Venema, and Stephanie Hensal of TKL/Cedar Creek. Special thanks to Jeff Hoffee who made the excellent Hoffee flight case that protects my guitars from harm.

Flip Scipio makes and repairs guitars in Brooklyn, NY. Visit flipscipio.com.

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The French Connection

IN THE WINE INDUSTRY, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES IS NOT A NEW PHENOMENON. { BY CHRIS GILL, CWAS }

WHEN FRENCH WINE magnate François Pinault, who also owns Bordeaux's Château Latour, purchased Napa Valley's acclaimed Araujo Estate winery in 2013, many considered it a turning point for the American wine industry and its acceptance by the French. The commonly believed story is that the French have long exhibited a condescending attitude toward American wines and started to begrudgingly accept them only after incidents like the Paris Wine Tasting of 1976, a.k.a. "The Judgment of Paris," which was the basis for a legendary *Time* magazine feature article and the 2008 film *Bottle Shock*.

However, the French recognized the potential for cultivating wine grapes and producing wine on American soil long before almost everyone else, with the exception of the Vikings, who named the North American territories they explored "Vinland" after the grape vines they discovered growing there. The very first attempts to make wine from grapes found growing in the New World were made by a group of French settlers between 1562 and 1564 who lived near where Jacksonville, Florida, is today. To their dismay, they found that the wines they made from Scuppernong grapes tasted unfamiliar and unappealing, but the upside was that they recognized the potential for cultivating wine grapes in America.

In 1619, the Virginia Company brought the first French wine grape vines to America, but attempts to cultivate them failed. This led to efforts to crossbreed French *Vitis vinifera* with indigenous vines, which during the 1680s led to William Penn's development of a hybrid, known as the Alexander grape, that is still used by wineries on the East Coast. In 1787, nearly 100 years later, French national Pierre "Peter" Legaux planted European vines on the same property near Philadelphia once owned by Penn. Legaux's goal was to establish America's first commercial winery, and he began selling shares in his Pennsylvania Vine Company in March 1793. Unfortunately for Legaux, it took him until 1802 to sell enough shares to officially incorporate his company, and in the meanwhile Swiss national Jean Jaques Dufour incorporated America's first commercial winery in Kentucky in November 1799.

While Spanish missionaries were vital to establishing vineyards on the West Coast of the continental United States in about the same timeframe, once again a Frenchman played an important role in the earliest commercial winemaking efforts there when Jean Louis Vignes imported vines from France in 1833 and established the West Coast's first commercial winery in Los Angeles. During the late-1840s Gold Rush, European immigrants brought vine clippings along with them and cultivated wine grapes in areas of Northern California that remain the most highly regarded wine producing regions in the United States. Although most of the French immigrants did not find gold, many put their prior experiences of working in French vineyards and making wine to good use by starting their own wineries in California.

These earliest chapters of America's wine industry are mainly the stories of upstarts, black sheep, and idealists who were far removed from the establishment. Today the story is more about how "the establishment" has embraced American wine-growing regions by expanding its production efforts here. One notable milestone was when Baron Philippe de Rothschild (of Château Mouton Rothschild) and Robert Mondavi joined forces in Napa's Opus One Winery in 1978. Many collaborations between French and U.S. winemakers took place before and since, but the involvement with the producer of a first-growth Bordeaux wine caused many to reconsider their biases about California wines.

I personally consider the establishment of the Domaine Drouhin winery in Oregon's Willamette Valley in 1987 one of the most significant benchmarks of the relationship between French and American wines in the modern era. Owned by Maison Joseph Drouhin, one of Burgundy's most esteemed producers, Domaine Drouhin has proven that Oregon can produce world-class wines. From their "premier cru" Cuvée Louise to their newest Roserock wines, Domaine Drouhin produces wines with a distinct character that combines the best of Veronique Drouhin's traditional French winemaking techniques with Oregon's distinctive *terroir*.

The Perrin family, known for their Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf du Pape wines, have had similar success making Rhône-style wines in Paso Robles, California, with their Tablas Creek Vineyard wines. Tablas Creek's Esprit de Tablas (formerly Esprit de Beaucastel) is made as an American counterpart to Château de Beaucastel with a decidedly European personality.

Should you ever wish to convert a "Euro snob" to American wines, the wines produced by Domaine Drouhin and Tablas Creek are probably your best bet, which in the best vintages can sometimes surpass their Old World counterparts. GA

ILLUSTRATION BY ARTBOY10/ISTOCK/TAMARA LEE

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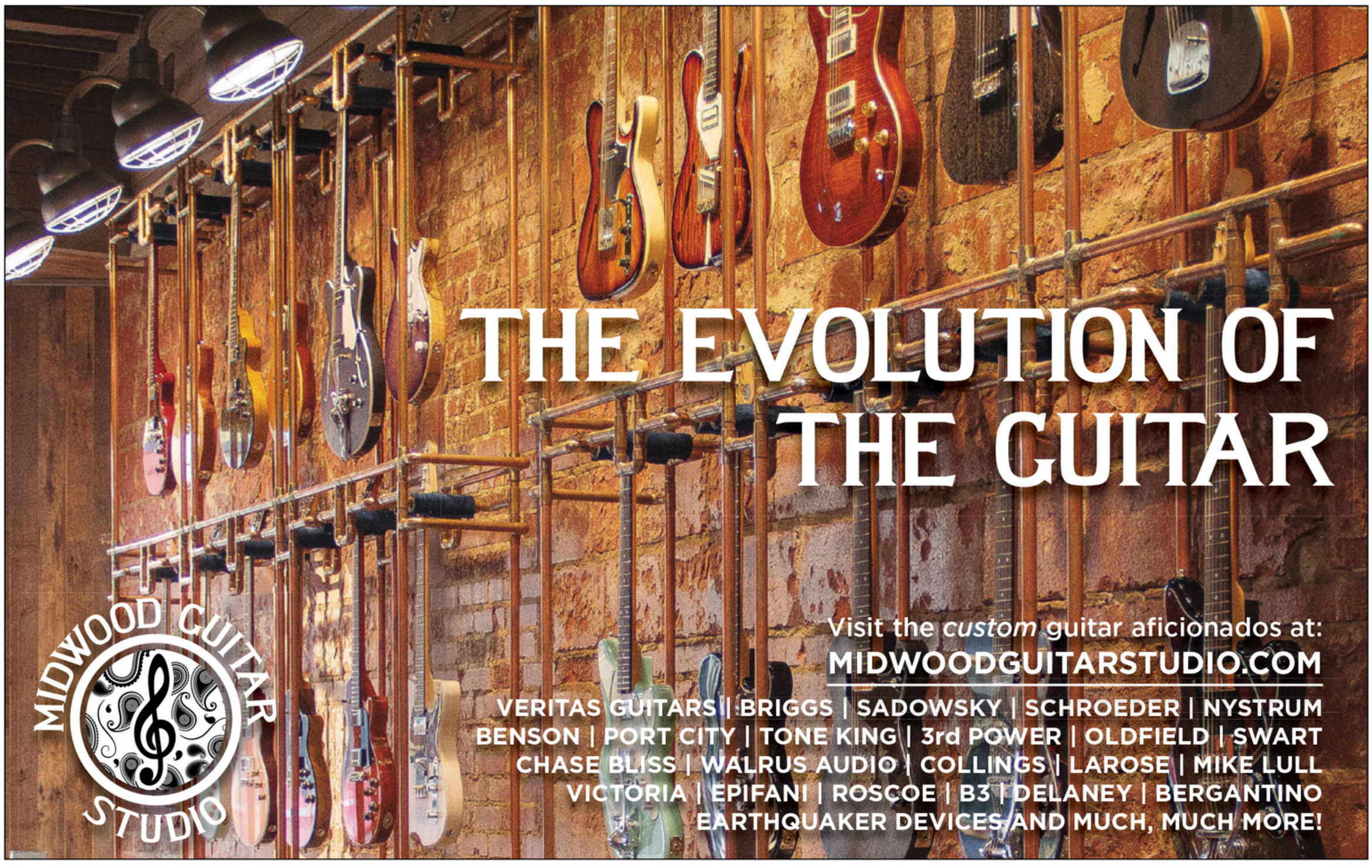

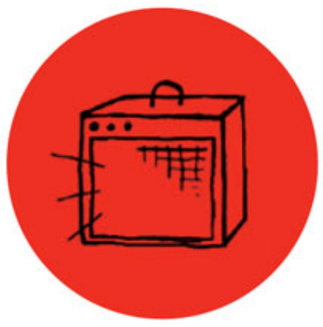

Restoration Hardships

WHEN ACQUIRING A VINTAGE AMP, SHOULD YOU REPAIR, RESTORE OR LEAVE IT ALONE?

{ *BY MITCH COLBY* }

I SPEND MOST of my time designing and building amps. Sometimes a diversion is needed, so I'll service vintage amps for friends and friends of friends. An ongoing debate in the amp tech world is what to do and how far to go when working on these aged beauties. A question recently came in from a *Guitar Aficionado* reader related to this very issue, so it seems that this is a good subject for "The Circuit."

In this case, the amp was a hardly used, mint tweed Champ. The new owner wanted to know if he should replace the original tubes and speaker to keep them in working condition for when it might be sold later to a future owner.

Before I give the answer to my recommendation, let's discuss the various options. The first thing to do is evaluate the condition. Is the amp's condition mint, excellent, very good, good, beat up, or hacked (the latter meaning bad modifications, poor repairs, additional holes in the cabinet and/or chassis, and so on)? When a vintage amp has been hacked, modded, or is in poor condition, I immediately say go for it. Replace anything that is off specification or broken, plus all electrolytic capacitors, including filters, preamp cathode caps, and bias caps. If the amp is in very poor cosmetic condition, either leave it alone if you like the "mojo," or have it recovered and replace the grille cloth. If the baffle is rattling, either fix or replace it. If there are holes in the chassis, install hole plugs. If the circuit has been modified, return it to stock unless you really like the way the mod sounds. The odds are it'll sound better or at least as the designer intended when you return the circuit to stock. Replace the AC cord with a three-prong cord with a molded end.

If the amp is in good to excellent condition, have your tech check that everything is working properly. Replace any parts that are way off of original spec. Depending on how old the amp is and whether it's been played regularly, the filter caps most likely need to changed since they'll be past their shelf life. Some techs will change filter caps as a matter of course, and you can't blame them, because they don't want you coming back in a few weeks or months with a broken amp due to those caps. I say it depends. I've seen 50-year-old amps with original caps that are still working fine, but these parts still must be thoroughly tested by a competent tech before you decide to leave them in. If you gig or play the amp regularly, by all means replace the filter caps. Also, you should *always* replace the bias caps in a vintage amp. Once again, replacing the AC cord with a three-prong cord with a molded end is also highly recommended.

If the amp is in mint condition, great care should be taken. Replace any off-specification parts with working original parts. For example, if it's a Blackface Fender, use Ajax blue molded caps and Allen Bradley resistors. If it's a Marshall, use Piher or Iskra resistors and Phillips (Mullard) mustard or chicklet caps, depending on what was used originally. These parts are not cheap, but the extra cost is worth every penny as they keep your amp looking original and many of these parts have an impact on the amp's sound. If the electrolytic capacitors are shot, replace them. If a pot is bad, have it fixed rather than replaced if you really want to keep the amp original. It may take more time and doesn't always work, but the effort is worth it. If you plan on selling the amp in the future, keep all of the old parts for posterity. If the amp is a museum piece and it won't be played much, I would leave the two-prong cord. However, most good techs will tell you to replace it with a three-prong cord for safety should you ever want to play through it, and they are right.

So, what did I tell the reader about his mint tweed Champ? Take the speaker out as it is old and bound to go bad if played loud and often. A Champ's original eight-inch Jensen speakers don't sound best in a tweed Champ anyway. Tubes? Either leave them in to enjoy how the amp was intended to sound or replace them with other NOS tubes and keep the originals for posterity. As far as filter caps, they will probably go as the amp wasn't used much, so replace them and keep the originals for the next owner. GA

Mitch Colby helped develop many Marshall and Vox amp designs and is the founder of Colby Amplification.

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Full Circle

Greg Brandt Standard Concert Model

BY CHRIS GILL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

CLASSICAL GUITAR ENTHUSIASTS wax poetic about the work of past master luthiers like Torres, Manuel and José Ramírez, Esteso, Hauser Sr., Bouchet, Fleta, and many others, and rightfully so. However, classical guitar construction continues to thrive and progress, and dozens of luthiers plying their craft today are making instruments that achieve new levels of excellence that often equal (and some would argue even surpass) the quality of instruments built by the past masters.

Luthier Greg Brandt, who has specialized in crafting nylon-string classical guitars for nearly 40 years, certainly qualifies as a present-day master luthier. Brandt has built guitars for classical players like Elizabeth Busch, Michael Kudirka, and Perfecto de Castro, jazz guitarists Jim Fox and John Pisano, Brazilian innovator Dori Caymmi, fingerstyle master Laurence Juber, and Hollywood session players like George Doering and Tommy Tedesco, who used a Brandt classical to record the theme to *Field of Dreams*.

Brandt is inspired by traditional designs and construction techniques but is not averse to modern custom touches like cutaways, alternate neck profiles and dimensions, and seven- or even 10-string guitars. The Standard Concert Model is the second guitar that Brandt has built with a decorative inlay motif nicknamed bubbles. Brandt built these guitars, along with another example with a rectangular tiles motif, as showpieces that subtly adopt the aesthetics of modern custom steel-string flattops without deviating too far from a classical guitar's traditional, relatively modest adornments. In this example, the "bubbles" are pieces of curly koa inlaid in the rosette, bridge, back, and tail of the instrument.

The bubbles inlay work is an option, but most of the guitar's other features, including the Indian rosewood back and sides, ebony fingerboard, and Honduras mahogany neck, are standard. This example has a Western Red cedar top, but Brandt also offers a European spruce top option for his Standard Concert Model. This example also has Sloane tuners with ebony buttons and engraved plates and ships with a TKL arched-top case.

The neck has a comfortable 650mm scale length and 52mm nut width, and its C-shaped profile offers a "just right" balance between heft for tone and comfortable playability. The gloss lacquer finish is immaculately applied with a light touch—the kind of attention to detail that mass-produced instruments can never match. The top is braced with a traditional fan pattern inspired by vintage masterpieces that have passed through Brandt's workshop, particularly instruments built by Hermann Hauser Sr.

One initial test that I always perform on a classical or flamenco guitar (and one that most mass-produced nylon-string guitars almost inevitably fail) is plucking the open low E string and playing notes on the high E string around the 12th fret. To me, the bass note should have a percussive attack, tight definition, and full, round body similar to a bass note on a piano, while the treble notes should sound sweet, possess a good amount of sustain and body, and respond well to playing dynamics.

The Brandt guitar passed my test better than any new classical guitar I've ever played with a price under $10,000, and it even delivered a gorgeous, expressive voice with impressive balance across its entire tonal range similar to several vintage masterpieces I've been fortunate to experience. The Brandt's dynamic responsiveness is like a mainline to a player's soul that expresses every detail and nuance of a player's technique with minimal disconnection from the source of the sound—the fingers contacting the strings. It's a highly inspirational instrument that can be powerful and bold when played with vigor, but its voice becomes sweet and lyrical when notes are caressed. Its volume output throughout is impressive and room filling, making it a true concert-grade classical guitar. While many guitars with cedar tops usually produce warmer tone and are less dynamically responsive than their spruce-top counterparts, this example delivers the best and most desirable attributes of both materials.

I love the modern aesthetics and understated glitz of the bubbles inlays, particularly how some playfully extend past the rosette into the top. The materials are gorgeous, with the cedar top and Indian rosewood back and sides all boasting tight, arrow-straight grain patterns. Brandt's decades of expertise are evident in every construction detail, from the seamless, flush fit of the koa bubbles inlays to the perfectly rounded and smooth curves of the scalloped nut, as well as in the expressive tone and overall playing enjoyment this instrument delivers. GA

PRICE $9,000 (as shown, Standard Concert Models begin at $7,000)
Greg S. Brandt, gregbrandtguitars.com

MASTER MIND Greg Brandt discusses the art behind his craft.

What was the inspiration for your bubbles and tiles inlay motifs?
Bubbles came from a shower curtain and tiles from a supermarket floor! I knew how much latitude steel-string makers had with their clients for unusual design work, and I decided it was time to try something different on a pair of "show guitars." I made some rosettes with pieces of walnut and liked them enough to carry the ideas further along on appropriate spots: the bridge decorations and the backs and butts of the guitars. I sold those and got orders which led me to continue experimenting.

Why did you opt for the Hauser-style fan bracing that you use?
I had the chance to spend some extended time with a few Hauser Sr. guitars early in my career. They were stunning in their clarity, singing quality, volume, and I was smitten. I began to incorporate subtle aspects into my own work and soon found the sound I desired in solid tops and fan bracing. That continues to be the foundation in the voicing of my tops: a singing treble, a rich, full (but not overpowering) bass, and a clear and even response across the fingerboard.

Do your construction techniques differ in any significant way from traditional classical guitars?
I build a fairly traditional guitar in a slightly less traditional way—more like a steel-string guitar in that I make the complete body in a mold. Then the finished body and rough neck are routed for the joinery, and the neck is attached with a floating tenon, similar to a dovetail used in steel-strings. It allows me better control of the overall geometry of guitar and to address playability and action for a particular player. Also, I carve the neck and heel once it's attached to the guitar.

Romeo and Giulia

2017 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio

BY MIKE DALY

TRACING THE HIERARCHY of Italian sports cars used to be a relatively simple matter. Once upon a time, the Maranello-based V-12s built by Ferrari led the pack, while the inline six- and four-cylinder cars from the Maserati brothers' Modena concern were close rivals in engineering and style. Both companies were relative newcomers compared to Milan's original brass-era outfit, Alfa Romeo, whose successful interwar twin-cam engine became the company's mechanical backbone for the next 50 years.

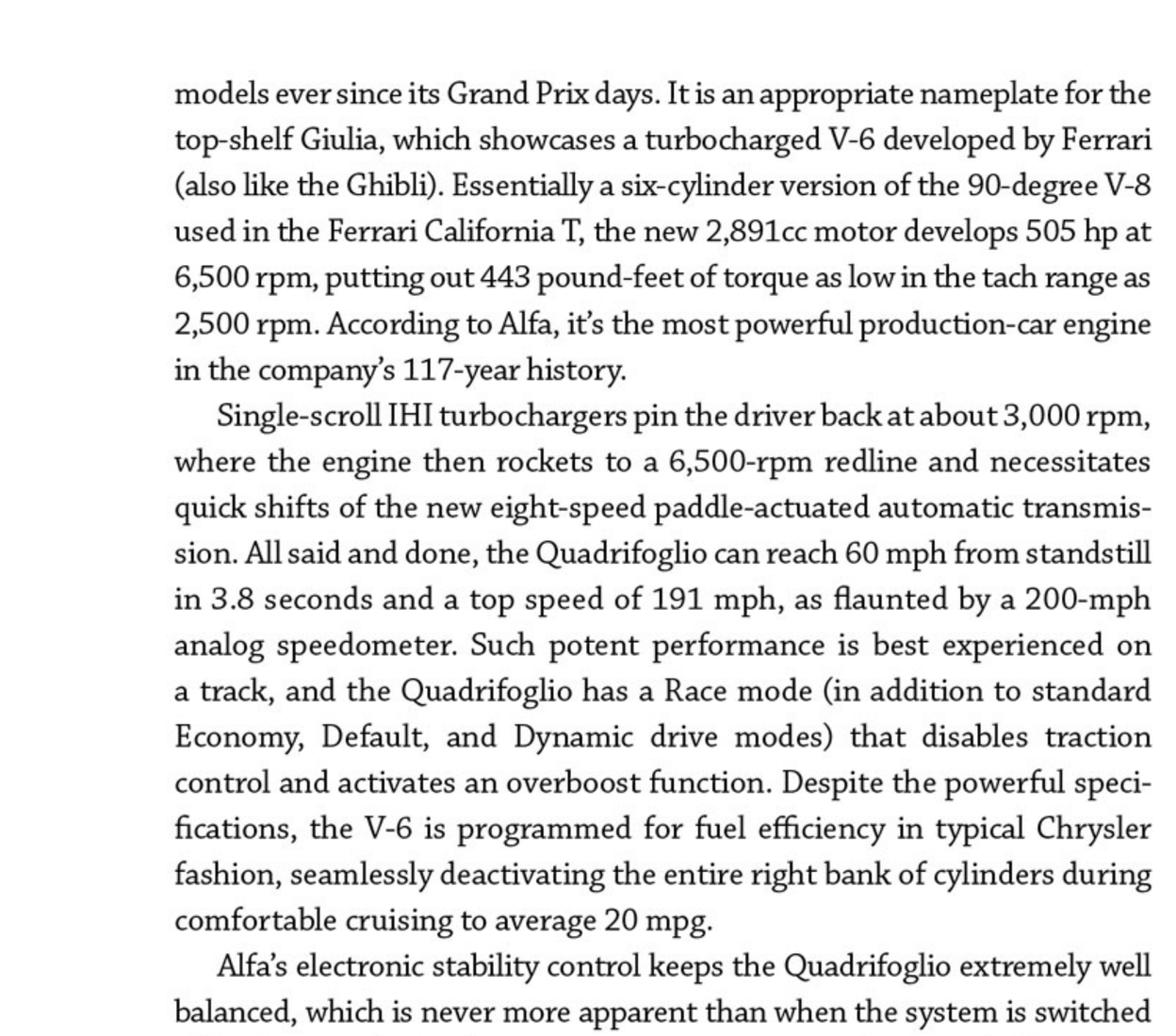
A four-cylinder development of the same engine powered the benchmark Giulietta model of 1954, which considerably bolstered Alfa's postwar sporting image and bottom line. In 1962, the inline-four again appeared in revised form in the Giulia, a more advanced version of the Giulietta that became available in sedan, coupe, and racing variants. From the Bertone-bodied Sprint Speciale to the highly desirable TZ racecar, the Giulia series included some of the brand's most iconic models.

Ironically, Ferrari, Maserati, and Alfa Romeo were all eventually absorbed under Fiat's gigantic umbrella, and the Turinese mass manufacturer has since joined Fiat Chrysler Automobiles to create an automotive behemoth of unprecedented scope. The resulting potential for cross-platforming makes Volkswagen Group's operation (which includes Audi, Bentley, Bugatti, Lamborghini, Porsche, and more) look subtle by comparison. To boot, tracking the model development of these individual companies now gives new meaning to the internecine and incestuous nature for which Italian drama is famed, at least if we're to believe Machiavelli, Shakespeare, and Showtime (see *The Borgias*).

This brings us to Alfa Romeo's all-new Giulia. Much like the current Maserati Ghibli, the Giulia is a new Fiat-managed performance sedan named in honor of one of the brand's most-celebrated vintage sports cars in the popular trend of heritage marketing. Offering far more versatility than the junior Maserati, though, the rear-wheel-drive Giulia comes standard-equipped with a turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine and starts at just under $40,000. It's also available as a far more Ghibli-worthy performance version called the Quadrifoglio, which retails at nearly double the base model's MSRP. This latter iteration was the subject of our all-too-brief three days of testing during Los Angeles's recent deluge of rainstorms.

Marque enthusiasts will recognize the four-leaf-clover Quadrifoglio badge that Alfa Romeo has occasionally brandished for special performance

The Giulia has a turbocharged V-6, classic styling, and a suprisingly roomy interior.



models ever since its Grand Prix days. It is an appropriate nameplate for the top-shelf Giulia, which showcases a turbocharged V-6 developed by Ferrari (also like the Ghibli). Essentially a six-cylinder version of the 90-degree V-8 used in the Ferrari California T, the new 2,891cc motor develops 505 hp at 6,500 rpm, putting out 443 pound-feet of torque as low in the tach range as 2,500 rpm. According to Alfa, it's the most powerful production-car engine in the company's 117-year history.

Single-scroll IHI turbochargers pin the driver back at about 3,000 rpm, where the engine then rockets to a 6,500-rpm redline and necessitates quick shifts of the new eight-speed paddle-actuated automatic transmission. All said and done, the Quadrifoglio can reach 60 mph from standstill in 3.8 seconds and a top speed of 191 mph, as flaunted by a 200-mph analog speedometer. Such potent performance is best experienced on a track, and the Quadrifoglio has a Race mode (in addition to standard Economy, Default, and Dynamic drive modes) that disables traction control and activates an overboost function. Despite the powerful specifications, the V-6 is programmed for fuel efficiency in typical Chrysler fashion, seamlessly deactivating the entire right bank of cylinders during comfortable cruising to average 20 mpg.

Alfa's electronic stability control keeps the Quadrifoglio extremely well balanced, which is never more apparent than when the system is switched off in Race mode. As the veteran automotive journalist Patrick Hong once told me, testing a car in the rain can provide superior diagnostics by exposing its limitations at slower speeds. Though this sage wisdom surely entered my mind at one point, a sliding fishtail on Mulholland Drive's slick surface during a rushed shoulder-lane launch was probably not what Hong had in mind. There's no doubt that the sticky Pirelli P Zero Corsa tires mounted on 10-inch-wide rear wheels helped me regain the proper lane without harm, as did torque-vectoring steering assist that is governed by a twin-clutch rear differential. The Quadrifoglio also comes standard with Brembo brakes featuring 15.4-inch front rotors and six-piston aluminum calipers (carbon ceramic discs are available as a $5,500 option).

Though the new Alfa is clothed with a mostly steel body, weight is minimized with aluminum subframes, doors, and fenders, as well as a carbon-fiber hood and roof. Carbon fiber is also the primary material in a rear wing and an active chin spoiler, the latter of which generates 220 pounds of additional downforce.

The Giulia's interior is surprisingly roomy, with a bulbous canopy and deeply reclining seats accommodating very tall drivers. Our test car was optioned with Alcantara-swathed Sparco racing seats with carbon-fiber shells that were exceptionally tight if a bit stiff, and oddly operated electrically for height but manually for distance positioning. In combination with the performance metrics and trip computer being triggered from an unremarkable button at the tip of the windshield wiper stalk, the controls impart a shade of the eccentricity for which vintage Italian sports cars are known. Notwithstanding the unusual ergonomic layout, the two-tone faux-suede upholstery provided an aura of luxury that was further boosted by an optional 900-watt, 12-channel, 14-speaker Harman Kardon premium audio system and a standard 8.8-inch infotainment screen.

As a major new challenger to the sports sedan class, the Giulia Quadrifoglio reminds us that while new models may be branded and marketed on the strength of their heritage, the realities of global automobile manufacture in the 21st century are not so poetic. While Maranello, Modena, and Milan used to compete against one another for the glory of the Italian Sports Car Championship, all three concerns are now owned and managed by a company they once outclassed with ease. But despite the fact that today's Giulia bears a Teutonic visage and a motor designed by a former competitor, it's still an endearing alternative to German sport sedans that possesses the vaguely eccentric appeal for which Italian speed machines are relished. GA

MSRP: Base, $72,000; as tested, $85,445

Alfa Romeo, alfaromeousa.com

Leading Lady

Friedman Amplification
Mini Dirty Shirley

BY PAUL RIARIO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

I'VE OWNED A fair number of Marshall amps of various vintages, from four-input Super Lead and Super Bass heads to JCM 800s, Silver Jubilees, all the way up to the JCM900 head. As I get older, my need for these 100- and 50-watt heads is waning, both because of their backbreaking weight and mind-numbing volume that's over the top for any venue I would play. I've been searching for a small-box head that offers all the same touch sensitivity, complex overdriven harmonics, and wide-open sound of those aforementioned amps, but with a more manageable 20 watts of power. Fortunately, I believe I've found the holy grail with the Friedman Mini Dirty Shirley head.

Many respected guitarists gush over the hot-rodded amplifiers of Rack Systems founder and amp guru Dave Friedman, whose years of modifying, building, and repairing amps has led to the signature series amps he designed for Jerry Cantrell, Steve Stevens, and others. Friedman's flagship amp is the BE-100 head, which pretty much nails the coveted EVH tone and much more—a perfect blend of modern high-gain with vintage British crunch and a pristine clean circuit. For players who prefer classic rock tones of the Sixties and Seventies in addition to his signature high-gain sounds, Friedman created the Dirty Shirley, which is a single-channel 40-watt, 5881-powered head. The Mini Dirty Shirley has the same level of body and crunch in a compact, single-channel hand-wired head that employs dual EL84 tubes in a cathode bias circuit, and pushes a loud 20 watts of power.

The Mini's layout is clean, with a single power switch (no standby), controls for bass, middle, treble, master, and gain, a three-position gain structure switch, and a transparent series effect loop on the rear. What is striking, especially for an EL84 circuit, is how the amp combines the right amount of bottom-end fullness and three-dimensional responsiveness without getting squishy. Friedman has certainly figured out the formula for dialing in all the proper and desirable frequencies to make the Mini sound huge and ferocious. The amp is a beast, with gooey, overdriven warmth that growls or sings depending on how much you push it, but also conjures the same magical tones at lower volumes. Setting the gain structure switch in the up position offers the most harmonically rich distortion, and no matter what guitar I plug into the Mini, it just nails that guitar's character in spades.

Using a variety of cabinets with Celestion Greenbacks and Alnico Blues, I found focused detail with the Greenbacks, while the Blues sound sweet and bell-like. (Friedman's 1x12 cabinet for the Mini Dirty Shirley is equipped with a Celestion Creamback speaker.) I particularly loved using the latter combination with my pedalboard and setting the gain structure switch in the middle for the least amount of color to the signal. Flipping the gain switch down adds more fatness, which is perfect for single-coil equipped guitars.

I don't think I've come across a head with a more seductive tone than the Dirty Shirley Mini. Call me filthy, but I'm taking her home. GA

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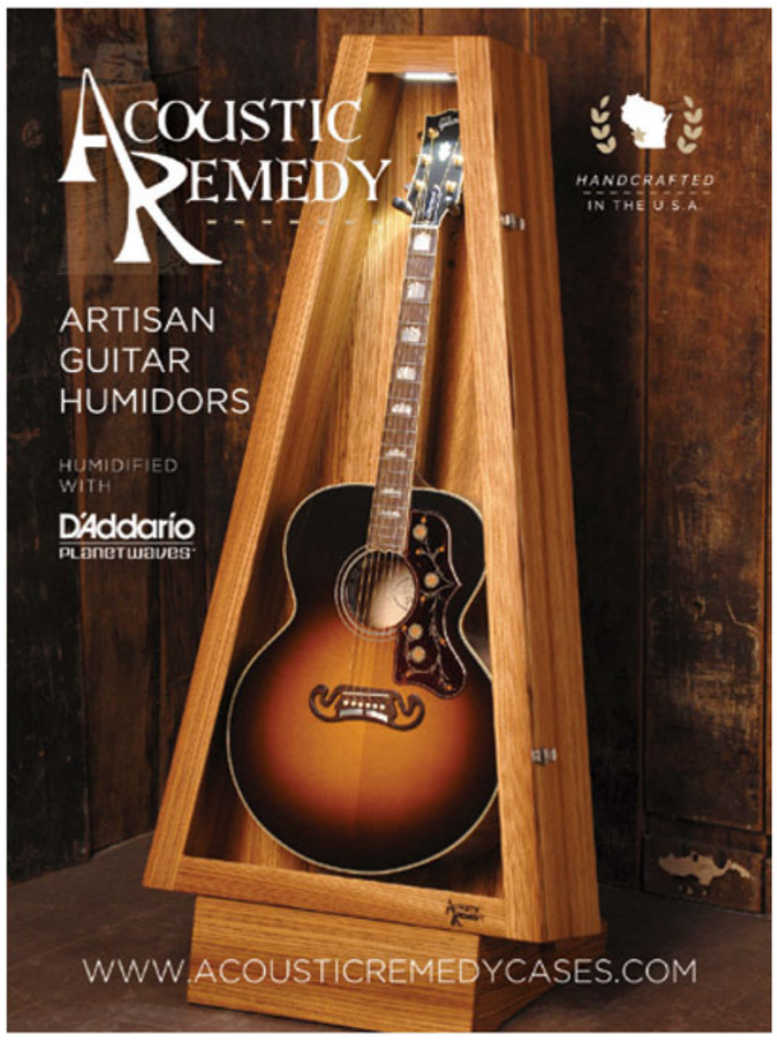

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As a kid, I stood hypnotized in front of the guitar shop window. I stared at the Gibsons, Fenders, Rickenbackers and Les Pauls, lined up like lacquered mahogany and maple trophies. With their smooth curves, each one could produce hot licks, reverb and a wailing solo. The six string guitar is the heart of rock and roll. I'm proud to say that today I feel the same way about the new Stauer ***Guitar Watch***.

We wanted to give our favorite vintage electric guitars their due with an impressive timepiece that captures the excitement of the golden years of rock and roll. The Stauer ***Guitar Watch*** is a legendary timepiece with bold, head-turning design and attitude to spare. It's rebellious enough to feel like you're getting away with something.

Meet your new favorite rock star. My only advice to the designers was to make a watch that looks exactly like rock and roll sounds. Big, bold and loud enough to wake the neighbors. It should evoke images of Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, The King and The Boss strumming crowds into a frenzy. But it should also reverberate with the spirit of the world's greatest rock guitar gods like Jimi, Eric and Keith (who was featured on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine wearing a Stauer watch). As you can see, the final product is worthy of a standing ovation.

It's only rock and roll, but we like it. One look at the Stauer ***Guitar Watch's*** voluptuous stainless steel body will bring you right back to the glory days of 45 and 33 rpm records. The eye-catching shape of the case recalls the round-bottomed bodies of the greatest vintage electric guitars.

The unique, ivory-colored face features blue Roman numerals on the left of the dial and bold Arabic numbers on the right. Blued, Breguet-style hands keep time while additional complications mark the day, date and month. A date window sits at the 3 o'clock position. Inside, the 27-ruby-jewel movement utilizes an automatic self-winding mechanism that never needs batteries. The watch secures with a genuine black leather band and is water-resistant to 3 ATM.

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Rare and unseen images of guitardom's greatest icons, courtesy of Rock Paper Photo

All Night Long

MUDDY WATERS IS CAUGHT IN THE ACT BY LEE TANNER.

AWARD-WINNING jazz and blues photographer Lee Tanner began shooting for *Downbeat* in 1958 and is renowned for his images of artists such as Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, John Lee Hooker, Janis Joplin, and many others. His work is featured in books such as *Images of Jazz*, *Images of the Blues*, and *The Jazz Image*.

Tanner, who died in 2013, captured this evocative image of blues titan Muddy Waters at a 1966 gig in Boston. Looking dapper in a glen plaid jacket, striped shirt, and tie, Waters holds a 1966 Guild S-200 Thunderbird guitar. It was a brand-new, experimental model for Guild at the time, and the company had hoped to popularize it via a short-lived endorsement deal with Waters and his band. Also visible on the bluesman's right hand are the thumbpick and lone fingerpick that were integral to Waters' seminal style of electrified Delta blues playing, which set the template for the amped-up sound of Chicago blues. Seen at the guitar's third fret is an old-school stretch elastic capo.

Eschewing flash devices, Tanner was an expert in the field of "available light" photography, which he deployed to catch jazz and blues players in their natural habitats—the concert stage and recording studio.

"The important thing is to be able to be present when the music is being played," Tanner told CNN in 1997, "because there is a very, very intimate relationship between the musicians, their music, and their instruments."

According to Tanner's daughter, Lisa—herself a professional photographer—he used a 2 1/4–inch square-format Mamiya 220 camera for the Waters photo. She adds that her dad also had a scientific background in metallurgy and that this mindset played a role in his photographic art.

"Photographers in the pre-digital era had to do the math and science to get the perfect negative," Lisa says. "With wide-open apertures and very slow film speeds, he was able to get amazing images. He was shooting back in the days when you really couldn't push the film beyond 800. It's amazing what my dad was able to achieve with a hand-held camera in dark, smoky clubs with very little light. I'm always moved by the emotion that he was able to capture." —*Alan di Perna*

Signed, limited-edition prints of this photo—and additional images by Lee Tanner—are available from rockpaperphoto.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LEE TANNER**

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